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KATHIE BRANDE.

A

Fireside History of a Quiet Life.

By HOLME LEE,

AUTHOR OF "THORNEY HALL," "GILBERT MASSENGER," "MAUDE TALBOT," &c., &c., &c.

NEW YORK:

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,

FRANKLIN SQUARE.

1857.

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KATHIE BRANDE.

A FIRESIDE HISTORY OF A QUIET LIFE.

"Say to all manner of happiness 'I can do without thee.' With self-renunciation life begins."—"*Sartor Resartus.*"—CARLYLE.

I.

FAR up amid the breezy northwestern hills there rises a little stream—noisy, brawling, insignificant. Through the long summer day it eddies with sparkling music among cumbering stones; faint odorous wild-flowers cluster in mossy nooks above its source, and broad green branches stretch athwart it to make rippling shadows in its sunshine. Here the only arch that spans it is the rainbow in the spray; the only breath that curls its tiny waves is the wind that toys among the balmy heather and golden gorse. In winter it comes down in a tearing flood, all foam and fury; in white haste it leaps from fall to fall, as if it longed to escape from the holy solitudes to the haunts of men. Now it swirls through a broad mill-wheel, making a mere plaything of it in its fresh and earnest strength; anon it dashes by a village, pours over worn stepping-stones, darts under the black arch of a bridge, and so away for many pleasant winding miles, until, weary with its over-haste, it creeps sluggishly between the darkling houses into the old cathedral city.

II.

There is a dim, almost forgotten legend, which dates the rise of Eversley from the days when there were kings in Is-

rael: we, however, will not grope so deeply into the glimmer of mythological and historical crypts, but will look on the present surface of things, glancing back only at those chronicles of change and time which are embalmed in still-existing monuments.

The city proper is inclosed by walls, around which the fierce roar of battle and siege has echoed again and again. On the great south road, centuries ago, from ten miles away, came sweeping the bloody torrent of the fight up to the very gate of the town. Ghastly skeleton heads grinned in the face of the Sabbath upon the flying and pursuing hosts, till tumbled down from their spiked eminence on the battlemented bar to make way for their last year's victors. Over the Mount from Marston, after their fatal defeat, came the broken Royalists to shelter within the city. Tradition tells of the hurry and confusion at the gate as they pressed in on that glorious summer evening—hot, shamed, furious, beaten men, whose arms God had withheld from conquering in a weak, lost cause.

At this day, looking outward from the walls, stretch the growing suburbs, meadows, pastures, corn-fields, gentle slopes crested with wood, quiet reaches in the river, and pleasant villages: only in a name here and there, which the legendary voice of the people has preserved, are any traces left of chivalrous or warlike times. But the mellow and romantic tints of old days cling fast to the city within; conspicuous from every point rise the mist-gray cathedral towers; for seven hundred years or more have they flung their holy shadow down upon the clustered houses below, whence generation after generation has crumbled into ignoble dust, while the monument of their sin or their repentance still lifts a sacred grandeur up to heaven. What religious master-mind conceived its glories, what architect planned, what skillful workman wrought on foliated capital, on stately column, on airy arch, tradition saith not: there the minster stands, the pride,

the grace, the glory of the ancient city. Hands never cease from it, or Time's remorseless decay either. With imperceptible touch he wears the sharp edge of solid buttress, dulls the point of arrowy pinnacle, gnaws the mortar out between the stones, and shakes the stained window in its granite frame. Then swift comes the cunning mason and repairs his brother's work, done centuries before, while the arch-destroyer creeps away to another aisle, and goes on with his silent labor in the shade.

Resting there, you may conjure back the chronicled times when kings kept their Christmas in Eversley, and came to worship with a train of mitred bishops, stoled priests, and gaudy courtiers; when faint aromatic incense odors, mingling with chanted prayers, floated upward to the dark galleries, whence cowled monks, in mortification and bitterness of spirit, watched the worldly pomps and vanities disporting themselves gayly in God's house. You may imagine the grim Puritan entering with a stamp of his iron heel and a clang of his ready sword, railing in his heart at what men as good as he have offered to their Master and his. This puller-down of old institutions, this scoffer against ancient superstitions—himself more bigoted and superstitious than any that have gone before him—scowls around at the beauty his dull soul can not feel. He would give to God of that which costs him nothing; verily, he would take the consecrated vessels from the altar, melt them down with a pharisaical incantation, stamp them with a die, and put them as coin into his purse.

Over the pavement what millions of now shadowless footsteps have passed! What hosts of defunct garments have trailed across the reflected radiance cast down out of heaven through the gemmed windows! The dim aisles are all haunted with the Past. Unseen crowds of spirits file in and out at the doors; the voices of choristers dead and gone mingle with to-day's anthem high up in the echoing roof; the long, thunderous roll of forgotten music swells and dies

along the choir; ghostly sermons are preached by ghostly divines to ghostly auditors; strange, uncertain shapes glide to and fro in the dusk—from pillar to pillar, from tomb to tomb, from gallery to gallery, all noiseless and trackless as the night—priest and penitent, prince and pauper, the saint canonized spite of his misdeeds, and the sinner absolved of his sin; a midnight gathering of an innumerable phantom host, the spiritual essences of the generations who have lived and died in the city. The quaint corbel-heads that finish the drip-stones above the doorways and arches seem to grin in the half-gloom, to turn their stony eyeballs, to move their lips, and to shake their twisted locks as if stirred with galvanic life. What odd faces they must have been that suggested these crumbling masks! Yet even now, among the figures that people the streets, you may encounter antique mummified visages, which, if struck into stone, might peer appropriately from a niche or garnish a corbel.

These things are not revealed to the bodily eye of every observer. Unimaginative thousands view the Cathedral only from an architectural point of view; they set their watches by the clock over the great south door; they are aware that two daily services are gone through by a staff of eminently respectable clergy, supported by a posse of little boys with high spirits, shiny faces, and crimped frills, guarded by a few men with silver pokers. You might talk to them for an hour without exciting a spark of enthusiasm: they are used to it; they have seen it all their lives; it is a store-house for centuries of damp; the bells are fine—yes, the bells are beautiful, and that is all they will allow.

We will not explore these haunted precincts with them, but rather go abroad into the rough, practical streets. In this neighborhood the houses are mostly ancient; narrow lanes, with projecting upper stories, branch off from the Minster-yard into Friar-gate; low, arched gateways, with rooms above them, lead out of these lanes into courts built round

with timber houses, the huge cross-beams of which, struck over with coarse plaster and rudely colored, are still sound and strong enough to stand as many centuries longer as they have already stood. Through their ruinous, yawning doorways you may descry dilapidated oaken staircases, deeply fretted with the tooth of time, wanting here a part of the hand-rail, and there half a score of clumsy balusters; lancet-windows, set in whitewashed walls, show fragmentary scraps of armorial bearings among their foul and broken panes; and in the wretched chambers where exist many poor families—journeymen tailors, shoemakers, bird-fanciers, and the like—relics of former splendors still cling to the walls in the shape of carved panels, elaborate mantel-pieces, and defaced gilding. Groups of playing children herd together on the open stairways where court gallants and gay ladies once went up and down, rustling in silk and velvet; while knots of picturesque tramps take up their rest under the arches: though it is to be feared that the power of charity has departed thence forever. There is generally a little colony of singing-birds in these courts: you may see the cages hanging on hooks beside the windows, and even on the wall below the sill, where the prisoner and the sunshine can have a talk together; and flowers, too—not dank and mildewed, but as full of scent and bloom as if they lived on country air—flourish profusely in these homes: *desolate* homes, I was going to say, but I think the birds and flowers are signs of better things, and that where they grow so beautifully rich human affections must grow too.

Picturesque to the very desire of the artist's eye are these courts and streets. When the sun is going down beyond Westgate it strikes the high-peaked gables with a red hue; it warms the cold yellow and black of the walls; flickers on the lattice-paned windows, and touches every prominence into broad effect. These are scenes for moonlight too: the shadows lurk so thick and mysterious in the doorways, with the

chill, white shimmer creeping to the steps, yet not daring to break the secrets of the gloom, that you almost look to see some fearsome shape glide out and pass you like a blast of freezing wind.

There is a fascination about these hoary relics of a past age that does not belong to the busier streets; for though, here and there, a gabled house is left, jammed in between modern fabrics as if improvement had forgotten it, the character of the place is lost. The inns have held their ground, and preserved their distinctive features best. There is an ancient hostelrie in the corn-market, by the sign of the Cross Keys, which hangs three stories, one beyond the other, over the pavement; its roof rises into high peaks, with clusters of spiral chimneys at each angle, and wide leaded windows in each room. Its front is of beams painted black and white, and round the yard is a covered wooden gallery, upon which the chamber doors open. There is a very old elm in this yard, which tradition says was planted in Queen Mary's time by a mad pervert, who, having renounced his faith to save his body, was afterward so troubled in his conscience that his wits forsook him, which was by many esteemed a meet judgment for his sin. They still show the place where he chose to live, believing himself in hiding there and safe from pursuit: it is a black, sunless den, which looks as if the maniac's remorse hung about it yet. There are other inns of this type also: the George, in High Street, the Red Lion, in Friar-gate, and the Fleece, in the Barbican, all of which are houses of good repute, and redolent with reminiscences of generations of travelers.

The churches within the walls are many in number. Standing near the south gate, and looking inward over the city, you see the low, square towers, the airy, graceful lanterns, and the slender spires rising above the closely-built houses, all gray with age, and quietly suggestive of buried piety. These edifices stand chiefly at street corners, many of them with

grave-yards attached, where the mounds, covered with rank grass, rise high above the level of the flags. There is no feeling of rest connected with these last homes, lying as they do in the midst of life-traffic; yet I can imagine some, wishful to think that they have not quite done with the stir and the turmoil, the loves and hopes of existence, preferring to moulder where old acquaintance may give their tombstone a thought and a glance in passing by, rather than in a still country nook, where the sun, and winds, and rains of heaven can alone light upon them for evermore.

The river takes a direct course through the midst of the city. Looking up the stream, the houses have the air of a foreign town; above the bridge many are built close to the water's edge, and are of the same quaint architecture as those in the vicinity of the Minster; below it are staithes, on which abut numerous low alleys; there are always vessels loading and unloading, and small craft going up and down; for, some fifty miles away, this moor-born river becomes a great estuary, where whole fleets ride, and by which sits one of the principal eastern trading ports. If you were to walk along the staithe on the left bank you would presently come to an open space and a beautiful planted walk, a short turn from which brings you up into Castle Street. Before you rises a massy, frowning edifice, the county prison: the debtors' side is only defended by lofty iron palisades inclosing a garden; this part is opposite to the open field, and here thousands of excited rabble, from far and near, collect periodically to witness solemn judicial tragedies enacted on a platform below a narrow black door in the wall. The lesson is very old in Eversley, and not profitable; indeed, some intellects there are so obtuse that they persist in remaining stone-blind to the moral of it, and in wishing that it might not be forced upon them any longer.

A little higher up this street are the Castle Mills and the Castle Bridge, which last spans a foul, sluggish stream, called

the Ness; this dike winds below the outer wall of the prison, and, passing under an old bridge in the Barbican, forms a pestiferous swamp, which is always going to be drained, but never gets begun. At one side of the Barbican bridge is the Fleece Inn; going down this street toward the bar it is mean and dirty, infested by beggars and other such gentry; but in the opposite direction are good shops, up to where it joins the market-place. In a line with the Barbican—a devious line certainly—are Wheel-gate, Finkle Street, and West-gate, which brings us back to the Minster neighborhood and the heart of the ancient city.

If I have described the Cathedral town with a too tedious minuteness, my love for it must be pleaded in excuse. Moreover, it forms the background of this family history.

III.

In one of the courts before described—Percie Court it was called—I was born on Christmas Eve. The clanging joy-bells of the old Minster close by drowned the feeble wail with which I announced my existence, and gave me a boisterous welcome into life. Nobody could have been more gladly received than I at that festive season, for I had no predecessors in my parents' house, though they had been five years married. I have been told since that I was a puling, fretful bit of a child at first, and no doubt this was true; for all the recollections I have of my early youth are cloudy with suffering and tears.

My father was a minor canon and curate of St. Mark's, the old church outside of Friar-gate. His income was very moderate, and as I proved to be the forerunner of a numerous progeny, his life became a struggle; for, in those dear times, with six little bodies to clothe and six little mouths to fill, it was often very difficult to make both ends meet decently. A season of sickness, which removed two of my brothers, was a heavy pull on our resources; indeed,

we never seemed to recover from it afterward. Up to fifteen my life knew neither change nor excitement, and but few pleasures, except to hear my mother say, "Kathie, you are a comfort to me."

My father was a reserved, studious, silent man; he took but little notice of us as children, and we stood in great awe of him. I can yet remember the sound of my mother's warning "Hush!" when his foot was heard on the stairs, which made us all as mute as mice. Yet he was not unkind; his voice was never raised in anger; and it is a mystery to me still why we crept into corners and away out of his presence as we did. He taught me my lessons daily, and was very patient, but I was always glad when the task was done—perhaps because he felt it irksome, and showed that he felt it. He was a tall man, with a slight stoop in his shoulders, and a negligent, slouching gait, with a nervous restlessness of movement that had become habitual to him. In one of the parlor windows he had a writing-table, where he sat at night with his books and manuscripts; then, if we spoke at all, it was in the smallest whisper, and when we moved it was on cautious tip-toe, with my mother's anxious eye following us. We imagined him to be writing some learned and ponderous history, and regarded his labor with deep reverence. He was busy with it at every moment of leisure, on the Sabbath as well as on the week days, and always until far on into the night. It was the Moloch to which he immolated time, health, natural affections, every thing. It had eaten up his heart, youth, spirits, and conscience. He was happy—at least I suppose he was, for his work was life and love to him, and he did not appear to have a thought beyond it; his professional duties he performed exactly and mechanically, his social duties not at all, or scarcely at all. I have watched him, sometimes by the hour together, pondering in my secret mind what this all-absorbing work might be, and yearning to lift were it but a corner of the veil behind which he lived

his true life. His large, pallid brow, streaked with shadowy gray hair, was the brow of a sage, but the eyes below it were lustrous, womanish, and of a wonderful beauty. I craved to know and love him better than I did, and wrought many a secret plan for winning a way into his heart; but the habitual awe in which we had been brought up prevailed, and that blissful time never came.

One night—the snow lay deep all round the Minster, and Christmas storms were abroad—there came a messenger out of Friar-gate to fetch my father to administer spiritual consolation to a man at the point of death. He left his work reluctantly. I can see him yet hovering about the table, fingering the manuscript, and hastily dashing down some happy thought, lest it should escape him ere his return. My mother had to remind him that the necessity was immediate, he delayed so long. After an absence of more than two hours, he returned, wet and tired; but he sat down to his papers at once and began to write; in a few minutes, however, he rose and approached the fire.

"Mary" (my mother's name was Mary), "I shall never work any more," he said, in a strange voice.

She was frightened, and asked what he meant, but he would give her no explanation; perhaps he could not.

His words were prophetic. He had been breathing a fever-poisoned atmosphere, and the taint of the disease was already burning in his veins. He relinquished hope from the first. In his wanderings he talked much of his great work, but of his wife and children never. He liked to have a pen in his hand, with which he drew mystical figures in the air; then his countenance was full of peace.

A short time before his death, sense returned, and with sense an expression of pain and mental care. "It is a mere splendid fragment," he said, faintly; "a torso without head or limbs. I thought to have hewn out a grand statue that should endure, but my fingers will never guide stroke more."

We understood him to speak of his great work.

"No one can profit by my life's labor; burn it, Mary, burn it."

He turned his face wearily to the wall, while my mother wept and held his hand.

Soon after, he took leave of us all; and while he was kissing little Jean, there came over his face a flashing as of light, followed quickly by the pale shadow of angels' wings; and we stole out of his awful dead presence wi[redacted]embling and tears.

He lies buried in St. Mark's church-yard, close under the low wall which parts it from the street. Passing by it, the stranger may see the tall, rank grass waving in the wind where it grows upon his grave.

IV.

Sorrow, which is never to seek, had come upon us heavily. With my father we lost, of course, our main support; indeed, but for an annuity of fifty pounds which my mother possessed, we should have been destitute. I imbibed a warm admiration for her independence and firmness of character at this juncture. She was resolved to maintain us by the labor of her own hands rather than to scatter us abroad among our well-to-do kinsfolks, to eat the bitter bread of charity. Her plans were speedily formed, and put into execution without delay. We remained in Percie Court because the rent was low; but our two servants were discharged, and we got in their place a girl from the Gray School, named Ann Farrer, of whose youthful eccentricities and incapacity I retain a lively remembrance to this day.

My brother Stephen was on the foundation of the endowed grammar-school, so that his education was in a manner provided for. He was a very handsome boy, dark-complexioned, with rich, curling hair, bright eyes, and a tall, straight figure; but in character he was indolent, fickle, and

without perseverance. He was my mother's favorite: she had set her heart on his entering the Church, because his father and grandfather had been clergymen; but the boy himself had no vocation for it; so, while she pinched, toiled, economized, and saved, to lay by sufficient to defray his college expenses, he studied or idled as suited his inclination of the moment. Many a long evening hour, which ought to have been consecrated to Latin theme and Greek exercise, was spent by him with the ringers up in the bell-tower of the Minster; but my mother always consoled herself in the idea that his great abilities would enable him to make up all arrears of study when he should awake to the necessity of it.

Of my two sisters, Isabel was too delicate and Jean too young to stand in need of any thing but home care and home tuition for some time to come; and while my mother, by various kinds of needlework, eked out for us a slender subsistence, I initiated Isabel in the mysteries of pot-hooks and hemming, coaxed little Jean through the alphabet, helped Stephen with his lessons and numerous impositions, made or mended the family linen, superintended the proceedings of Ann in the kitchen, and remonstrated with her gravely when her vagaries overpassed the bounds of reason.

Isabel had more of my father in her face than any of us, but hers was a peculiar and willful temper. There were moments when nobody could control her; fits of passionate, brooding sullenness, when one might have imagined her possessed with an evil spirit. At other seasons she overflowed with uncontrollable spirits, which, however, usually took a mischievous turn before they effervesced into stillness. Ann used to say to her then, "Oh, but you are the very mother of mischief, Isabel!" and the epithet was not inappropriate. Jean was the patient little loving slave to her caprices, always eager to ward off from her annoyance and offense, just as my mother had been with my father. Isabel had in every thing her own way; my mother feared to struggle with her

peculiar character, lest it should be heated to revolt or hardened into obstinacy. I waited on her and submitted to her mechanically, because it seemed to be my place in the household to serve, work, and obey. She had, however, in the core of her heart, smouldering fires of love, which broke forth now and then like volcano flame. She would have worn one to death with sacrifice and exaction, and then slain herself for very sorrow and remorse.

Jean and I took after our mother both in [redacted] and in disposition.

V.

I look back upon my ancient and gloomy birth-place with a love which those whose lot has fallen in brighter places will scarcely understand. Percie Court lay quite under the shadow of the Minster, and was always hushed, and always darkling. The house had not then been divided into separate tenements, and was esteemed a most respectable dwelling, though the upper chambers were disused because the floors were broken and unsafe, and the huge rafters showed the bare tiling of the steep roof between their massive bulk. From the court we entered a stone hall, quite naked and empty, smelling of damp and church vaults, always full of drafts, and colonized by spiders; thence a spring-door, covered with discolored red cloth, led into the habitable part of the house. On a bright summer evening, passing through the red door was like leaving a charnel-house for a church aisle. There was a window of curious, rich stained glass sunk into a recess of the staircase opposite, through which the setting sun cast the glow of ruby, sapphire, and topaz on the dusky oaken balustrades, the paneled walls, and shallow, hollow steps; at all other times they looked blank and cold as the hall; only at sundown were they quaintly tapestried with more brilliant dyes than loom of mortal fashioning can weave.

As a child I loved this window dearly: it was my favorite

reteat; and crouched in its seclusion I spent most of the few idle and happy hours that fell to my lot. Thither I carried my books to read undisturbed by the little ones, or, perhaps, sometimes to escape my seam. A curious collection those books were on which my mental cravings were fed: there was an old edition of Shakspeare's Plays, with quaint engravings, which delighted me amazingly. I shuddered at Shylock's tenacious holding to the letter of his bond, but I had a s[redacted] pained sympathy with him too, as the one strong, r[redacted]ul soul among an oppressed and hated race. "Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is?" There was the burning, passionate thrill of deadly hate in it, which stirred me as intense and eloquent feeling, good or evil, ever does stir some hearts. Hamlet's philosophy puzzled me, though the sound of it wakened up my keenest thoughts: was he mad, or selfish, or what? The riddle is not solved to this day. Then, with the weird witches in "Macbeth," and the rising procession of phantoms, I shivered in nerve-creeping horror; but the crowning joy of all, even though it made me wake in the night chill with starting fears, was Clarence's dream. That—

"O Lord! methought what pain it was to drown!
What dreadful noise of water in my ears!
What sights of ugly death within mine eyes!
Methought I saw a thousand fearful wrecks;
A thousand men that fishes gnawed upon;
Wedges of gold, great anchors, heaps of pearl,
Inestimable stones, unvalued jewels,
All scattered in the bottom of the sea.
Some lay in dead men's skulls; and in those holes
Where eyes did once inhabit, there were crept
(As 't were in scorn of eyes) reflecting gems,
That wooed the slimy bottom of the deep,
And mocked the dead bones that lay scattered by."

That was a vivid picture to me; I could, when I pressed my hand upon my eyes, see those white relics and gems strewn among the weeds beneath the sea; "the envious flood" which still kept prisoner the panting dreamer's soul; the blue and livid corpses prone upon the slimy sand. It haunted my sleep for months, as afterward did an awful story of a murder that Ann related with all its minute details, and probably a large amount of vulgar exaggeration.

In quieter mood I found the "Spectator" pleasa[redacted]npany; I had a firm belief that all the Amintas, Chloes, [redacted] Sylvias were real women, and entertained a presumptuous suspicion that many of them were very silly ones, and must have been trying to the short-faced gentleman's patience. There was "Rasselas" also, which I liked better then than I do now, and the "Vicar of Wakefield" (a real person, because Wakefield was down on the map), and that queer Chinese who was a "Citizen of the World," and "Junius's Letters" (it is a marvel to me what amusement I contrived to discover in them), and a few other old books; but nothing, nothing new. I was often in a profound state of mystification over these desultory private readings, but I rarely sought help in my difficulties, lest my liberty should be curtailed; I blundered on till the light came to me, and if it never came I bided contentedly in the dark.

"Kathie, you will read yourself blind," my mother used sometimes to say; but her authority asserted itself no further, and I was left to my own devices, at least until my father's death. Subsequent to that event my idle times were very few and very far between. This is why that ancient painted window glows like a gem unique in my memory: no after-readings have had half the pith or charm that lurked in the stolen hours spent in its gusty seclusion.

To the right of the red door opened the kitchen, to the left a mouldy-smelling flight of brick steps led down into a mysterious region into whose depths I never penetrated, but

which my imagination peopled with many terrors both of a bodily and spiritual nature, such as the restless tenants of a neighboring church-yard; bones lying white on the earthen floor; rats crouching among them, with bright eyes, and crawling things running up slimy walls.

Our parlor opened from the first landing: it had a western aspect, and though it was a large, low-ceiled room, with wainscoted walls, black with age, and antique furniture to match, had a homely pleasantness to all of us. There were three long, narrow windows, curtained with faded folds of crimson cloth, which had been rich and sightly once upon a time, though that day was past; a circular mirror, cracked across and with a tarnished gilt frame, whose reflections were an antidote to personal vanity, was secured against the wainscot between two of these windows. The mantel-piece was lofty, and curiously carved in foliage and angels' heads; it sustained as ornaments several Chinese figures, grotesquely ugly, and all more or less mutilated, which my brother Stephen impiously styled our household gods. In a recess by the fire place stood my father's empty chair, and near it the writing-table he had always used; at the upper end of the room was his book-case, piled to the ceiling with dusky lugubrious volumes, which presently grew gray with dust and lack of use.

The centre window opened upon a brick-work terrace, from which, by a flight of broken steps, we could descend into a narrow strip of ground, which we dignified with the name of garden, though it had neither greenness nor beauty. A few pined shrubs and scentless flowers held a precarious existence in the sapless mould, but the walls on either side were so lofty as quite to exclude the genial sunshine, so that the little struggling blossoms died unblown. My mother had a custom of going out there on the Sunday evenings in summer-time: she used to pace gently backward and forward, meditating gravely, and sometimes murmuring to herself

verses of our hymns. I do not think her temper was silent or reserved by nature, but it had grown so by habit; she was scarcely less contemplative and quiet than my father had been.

I had a little chamber to myself, with one latticed window which looked full on the grand old Minster. I could lie in my bed, and watch the sun stealing down from pinnacle to pinnacle with silent steps, circling the bell-tower with a halo, while the streets still lay in the gray of the morning; or the moonlight making black shadows in doorways and empty niches; or the snow lying white on ledge, and buttress, and roof. Solemn always, majestic always, but most about Christmas-time, when the waits roamed about the streets on bitter nights, and woke me out of my sleep with loud-sung carols, and I sat up to listen with dreamy eyes on the Minster towers, through which the northeast wind whistled a noisy chorus.

But it is enough of this; let me remember that my home, full of voices as it may be to me, is to others but a dumb picture.

VI.

It is a life-history, not a romance, that I have undertaken to tell; therefore, if any look for wild adventure or marvelous experience, let them close this book, for they will find in it only disappointment. To those whose lines have fallen to them in quiet lowly places, who endure rather than struggle, who patiently take their daily labor as it is laid out for them, inch by inch, and piece by piece, my story may go home like an echo of their own pale lives, possibly to encourage, to strengthen, and to console; for other than these it can have but small interest.

I can make no appeal to the sympathies of those who go clad in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day, save in those two things which the great human heart

has in common—love and death. And even there we should be at variance; for life is a more earnest matter with the workers than the pleasure-seekers, and both love and death meet *us* with less pomp and circumstance than *them*.

But in the ingle nook I may be welcome; for I have had my silent sacrifices, my pinching economies, and times when existence seemed held on a hard feudal tenure of perpetual service, which made the grave look like a door of escape from the house of bondage. A few glimpses through this ever-opening portal have I had into the valley beyond; but when I would fain have pressed forward to gain those plains of rest, there was always a hand to put me back, and a voice that bade me bide my time. Hours of crying when there was none to hear, heavy rains of affliction, and "clouds returning after the rain," have not failed me; yet have I had my wanderings by still waters, and my rainbowed skies like others, a life of true April sheen, mingled sun and showers.

I am, let me premise, no heroine; I never did or conceived a deed trenching on the heroic. My path has lain before me without choice; nothing short of wings could have borne me out of it: whether it has been rough or smooth, flower-decked or overgrown with stinging-nettles, it is for others to judge. I am come now to the gray November of my year, and as it lies mapped out before my dim eyes, there are spots with the sun on them, and, near by, dense shadows under rocks and trees, which make their glow the tenderer; and there is a sound of rippling water, now faint, now ringing clear, now overpowered by other voices, which I take to be the ever-living fount of hope in the heart, growing broad, full, and free in these latter days, as I and it glide outward together toward the eternal sea.

VII.

Sitting one night at my work, an idea flashed into my mind. Stephen was gone to the bells, and the little ones

were in bed, so my mother and I were alone. My fingers ached over the long, stiff seam with which they had been busy for an hour; I stretched them, yawned, and gave several unequivocal signs of being thoroughly tired. My mother was knitting some fancy-work socks, and her needles kept up their monotonous click, click, though her eyes were raised. They again reverted to her work, when they had taken in what I am afraid they often saw at this period, namely, an unhappy, discontented face.

Suddenly I spoke. "Mother," said I, "where did you live when you were a girl?"

I have not yet described my mother: you shall have her portrait as she looked then, sitting in her high-backed chair, with an expression of surprise in her large, uplifted eyes at the oddity of the question—a question none of her children had ever asked before; for, though kind and gentle, she was always very reserved with us.

Imagine a figure rather below the middle size, straight as a dart and thin, clad in a well-saved dress of black stuff, an apron of white muslin, and a folded neckerchief of the same spotless material crossed on her bosom, and fastened at the throat with a jet brooch. Imagine a face of grave expression, small featured, and pale, with eyes of a peculiarly clear and brilliant brown; brows finely arched, but losing their darkness; and gray hair carefully smoothed from a high forehead under her widow's cap. She was forty-six years old at this time, but, notwithstanding her alertness of manner, she looked much older from her exceeding gravity.

My question was unexpected, and my mother and I gazed at each other for a moment or two in silence; then she smiled —her smile was as pleasant as it was rare—and said, "In quite a country place; in a little moorland village, where the church was like a barn, overgrown with moss and ivy, and the parsonage was a whitewashed cottage. There were a few slated hovels in a hollow below, and no other house within three miles of ours."

"Oh, mother! how lonely it must have been!"

"Not so, Kathie; I loved it dearly, and my heart yearns to it yet. It seemed to me as if I could scarcely breathe when your father brought me down into this low country. I pined a long while for the sharp air of the fells and the briny scent of the heather. I feared almost that I should die, cramped up in this place; but the home-sickness wore off at last. Still, I should like to see those bleak Cumberland hills once more before I die."

There were tears in my mother's eyes as she spoke: my random questions had opened out far-away vistas in her memory; so I gathered up my work and stitched diligently on, letting her meditate in peace. She was the first to break the silence. "When I remember it all, it makes me feel foolish, Kathie," said she; "but it was so beautiful! Upon the hills beyond the church I have wandered many a summer day: all around was deep solitude and infinite calm; billowy steep beyond steep, with lurking glimpses of the mountain tarns nested among them. Far away in the purple west stretched the sea. Oh, Kathie! words are not colors, or my love could paint you a fair picture of these bonnie dales, with the gray, torn veils of cloud wreathing the fells in twilight. I think any poverty would have been more endurable than the pang of leaving home."

"How was it, mother? tell me."

"I married some years before my father's death, but I never left him, for he was an old man, and in failing health even then. But the solitude fretted your father, for he was not moorland-bred, like me, and had no love for the sights and sounds of nature; and when death released my remaining parent, we left Cumberland at once. For six months we were at Whitecliffe, a beautiful sea-coast town, where I could have been very happy and contented; but my husband was made minor canon of Eversley, and as it was necessary that we should live here, he exchanged his country living for the

perpetual curacy of St. Mark's; and having the command of good libraries, and such society as was most congenial to him, he never showed any disposition to move again."

"Have you any brothers or sisters living, mother?"

"No, Kathie, I was an only child; but you have relatives on your father's side. There is your Aunt Aurelia, Mrs. Marston, who is a widow, and your grandmother Brande, who is still living at Crofton, where your father was born."

"Have you ever been there, mother?"

"Never, child; neither have I ever seen any of your father's friends. There was some difference between him and his mother, that was never fully explained to me."

"Poor papa! Do you think he was in the wrong?"

"Oh no, Kathie. He was kindness and goodness itself. Mrs. Brande was a proud, austere woman, I have heard; quite unlike her son."

The sharp click of the knitting-needles went on, and I toiled at the interminable seam until the Minster clock struck nine, when my mother bade me go and see that Ann had Stephen's supper ready, for as he had not been in to tea he would be ravenously hungry. Glad to be released on any service, I folded up my work and went down to the kitchen. Ann was sitting with her feet on the fender, darning her black worsted stockings by the light of an unsnuffed candle, which just served to make darkness visible in the great kitchen. She sprang up as I opened the door, and ran toward me staring and half affrighted. I could not help laughing at her odd, bewildered air.

"Indeed, Miss Kathie, but you gave me a turn!" cried she, breathless; "this old house is so lonesome: out and out worse than the Gray School."

"And that was bad enough, Ann, I dare say. It is lonesome; I have thought so myself often."

"Especially since the master died, Miss Kathie. If it was not for the cricket that lives down by the boiler, I would be

regularly moped some nights. I wonder how them creatures can bide the heat; will you tell me, miss?"

"I do not know myself, Ann; but I have read that there are things which live *in* the fire: they are called salamanders."

"Indeed, miss, and what may they be like? are they boggles, or spirits, or what?

"They are salamanders, Ann; that is all I know. There are none in this country, I believe."

"You are not meaning the picters in the fire, miss, that one sees when one looks in among the coals? I see a many some nights. 'Deed, but this is a haunted old house, though your mother does say there is nothing to be met in it worse than ourselves." Ann sighed and waved her head dolorously: at fifteen a quiet life is insufferable.

Having delivered my order and seen it executed, I was returning slowly to the parlor, shading the flickering flame of the candle with my hand, when the loud clash of the outer door, and a rush of cold air which almost extinguished the light, warned me of Stephen's tardy return. He came through the red door whistling cheerily; and when he espied me standing at the top of the stairs, he cried out in his usual mode of addressing me, "Kathie, is that you?—Kathie the moody—Kathie the mournful."

At the sound of her darling's voice my mother issued from the parlor.

"Stephen, my boy," she said, looking down over the banisters, "leave your coat in the kitchen, and pull off your boots. Kathie will get your slippers. Are you wet?"

"Wet, my revered mother!" echoed Stephen, laughing; "how can any body be wet with walking twenty yards on a starlight night in as hard a frost as February is in the habit of treating us to?"

This was quite true; but our dear mother was always so anxious.

We entered the parlor together, and soon Stephen appeared, carrying a candle to light Ann up stairs with his supper-tray; he was teasing her all the time, and contrived finally to puff out the light as she took it from him to leave the room. We heard her groping her way down stairs, and we heard also a clattering fall and smothered shriek as she got to the bottom. Stephen laughed mischievously, and shook his curly head; while my mother looked a very mild reproof, and bade him eat his supper, which he instantly applied himself to doing with a most vigorous and healthy appetite. Having finished, he pulled up his chair to the centre of the hearth, and proceeded to tell us of his doings up in the bell-tower. We always listened with interest; for, as Ann shrewdly observed one day when his mother was out of hearing, "There was nothing Master Stephen liked so well as being made a god on;" and as we were not often—or I may say, *ever*—disposed to thwart him, he was made a god of accordingly. After he had related all, he yawned audibly, stretched his lengthy limbs, and asked if Kathie were there; I made answer that I was still in the presence.

"Oh, then, Kathie, you can't be half so tired as I am with those horrid bells," cried he; "you don't know how they make a fellow's arms ache. I wish you would help me with that imposition that Withers gave me this morning. Do, that's a dear Kathie!"

I had now approached the fire-place, so he put his arm round me coaxingly and gave me a kiss; of course, I immediately consented to write out the imposition, which called out a smile on my mother's face. She was always glad to see Stephen relieved of any burden. Her smile somehow irritated me, though for the moment I checked the expression of my jealous feeling.

"Then I'll go to bed, for I am famously tired," said my brother, pleasantly. "You know where the books are, Kathie;" and having first sprinkled me with icy water from

the pitcher, and trodden on Cherry the cat's tail, he took his departure singing.

When he was gone, my mother brought out her knitting again, though I am sure her eyes were tired, for the sake of keeping me company during the hour the imposition would take to write. I forget now how many lines of Latin verse it was, but I remember thinking it as weary a task as the seam; both head, back, and fingers ached when it was done.

"Well, Kathie, have you finished at last?" my mother asked, as I rose to put away the books.

"Yes."

I spoke sullenly, at which my mother looked surprised and grieved, but gently bade me warm my feet before going to bed.

"They are not cold," was my short reply.

"Come, Kathie, I want to talk to you a little while," she persisted, at the same time eyeing me wistfully.

I obeyed, but with a gesture of weariness and impatience.

"Child, you look sick and ill; tell me what ails you. Is it that this hard-working life is wearing you out?" my mother asked, with a plaintive tone in her voice such as we were not used to hear.

I loved and reverenced her dearly, but her unconscious encouragement of Stephen's selfishness that night had roused the dormant spark of jealousy in my heart, and all my native sullenness rose up moody and resentful. After waiting a few minutes for an answer, which I was in too ill a humor to give, she added, "You are tired, Kathie; go to bed now; to-morrow we will talk." I took my candle without a word, and went.

My mother's ordinary manner was cold and quiet; she was not demonstrative in her affection as some women are, except to Stephen, who seemed little grateful for her love; and this had kept me further aloof than a daughter should be from her mother's heart and confidence. It was her

nightly custom to come and see us in our beds before going to her own, and I knew she would not fail me for what had passed. As I went through her room I staid a moment to look at my little sisters; they were both fast asleep. Isabel with her sweet face lightly flushed, her red lips parted, and her golden brown hair escaping from her netted cap; Jean's soft, pale features smiling in her sleep, and her round, restless little arms tossed outside the coverlet. They seemed so far, so very far removed from me, their elder sister! Gazing at them, the tears gathered thick in my eyes, and for a moment I wondered if I could ever have been like them. Then I remembered that I never was; that I had been delicate and suffering, plain and solitary, and my heart felt these things as wrongs.

I moved away to my closet and shut myself in. I never was a child who cried passionately, but I can remember times when I sat with folded hands on my knees, and out of the blind, resentful soreness of my spirit rose a swelling flood of tears, which fell like drops of a thunder-shower. So sat I now, cold and shivering, on the edge of my bed, looking drearily at the stars in heaven and the Minster towers gleaming white in their shimmer. I was still there when my mother came in.

"What, not in bed yet, Kathie?" said she, cheerfully. Then, seeing that I was crying, she took both my hands in hers, and bent forward to kiss me. "If my little Kathie knew how her mother loves her, she would not come and fret here alone, instead of telling her trouble to the only heart in the world that would be sure to sympathize with her," she said. I laid my aching forehead down on her cool hands. "Think, Kathie, of what you have been to me, of what you may still be—my greatest help and comfort next to God; and then consider what I must feel to see you sullen and unhappy. If I could, my poor child, I would give you a good education, and amusements, and companions; but you know

I can not. I have worked hard all my life, and have been contented; if your lot is to be the same, take it patiently: there is One who can lighten your burden, and make it even easy to bear."

"I do not complain, mother," said I, despondingly; "I can work; I do work; at least I do my best."

"Yes, Kathie, you have been a good child always; you are industrious, obedient, unselfish: you have been friend as well as daughter to me."

"I know not what ails me to-night; I am full of wrong feelings; every thing seems hopeless and sad; I can not be content; I am of no use to any body."

"Kathie!"

My mother's gravely reproachful accent stung me. I went on speaking rapidly and bitterly, never thinking of the cruel stabs I was dealing.

"I am of no use to any body; if I were dead, nobody would miss me. Isabel would help Stephen, who is the only person cared for in this house. Stephen is first and last with every one. I am not like other girls; I never was. As a child I was always sickly, and now I am ugly, and a mere household drudge. If there is any thing to fetch or carry, it is 'Kathie here, Kathie there:' I see no end of it, and I am sick of it already."

I had ceased crying, and looked straight in my mother's face. She was very white, and trembled excessively; she had dropped my hands, and stood a few paces off, gazing at me almost shudderingly. When she spoke again, which was not for several minutes, her voice was so changed, so faint and low, that it sank into my heart with strange power; it echoes there yet sometimes with a thrill of remorse for my ungrateful cruelty to that good mother.

"Kathie, it shall be changed; you shall not have to complain again," she said. "I thought I had done and was doing my mother-duties well: God knows, my children's wel-

fare is my only care. I must have gone wrong, strangely wrong, somewhere."

Her voice wavered and broke. I could not bear this; to hear my gentle, long-suffering mother accuse herself to me—a sullen-tempered, wayward, petulant child! My arms were round her neck, and I had kissed her twice or thrice ere either spoke again. I felt her tears wet on my cheek, and then all the enormity of my passionate accusations smote me. I was more eager to retract than I had been to denounce.

"Oh, mother!" I sobbed, in a broken whisper, "forget what I have said; I do not mean it. I would rather live on bread and water, and work day and night, than go away. Only love me, mother; talk to me sometimes; tell me of your own cares and trials."

"You fancy, Kathie, that to hear of my shortcomings and my young working days will bring you easier through your own; you are right. I never thought of that," interrupted my mother, holding me closely to her heart, and putting back the hair from my burning forehead that she might press her lips there. "I have been wrong—do not contradict, child, for I say I have. Many an hour's sewing might I have lightened with old-world stories, when I have suffered you to sit mute and sickening over the monotony of your life."

Her tender caresses exorcised the evil spirit; and as she spoke softly and lovingly, her words were like balm to my wounded heart.

"We will try to mend, Kathie, both of us; your mother must not lose her right hand yet. We should miss you sorely, my child, if you were gone away from us—Stephen as much as any. Don't be jealous of the poor boy; I love you all alike, but he is more dependent than you, and more exacting. I know his faults; they will lessen as he grows older; they are the faults of his sex."

I looked surprised, and my mother smiled. "We will not enter on a discussion of masculine and feminine foibles now,

Kathie," added she, "we shall both be better in bed. So good-night, my dear little Christmas gift, my pale winter blossom, good-night."

VIII.

I knew that I was fully, freely forgiven; that when my mother went away into her own room she carried with her a tenderer sympathy for the child whose love had betrayed itself in over-jealous passion; but I could not pardon myself. No coldness, no impatience had she ever shown me, that I should accuse her of partiality; and as for work—had it not been her portion? was it not the portion of millions?

Weak that I was to fret and chafe under my burden! My reflections were bitter, but salutary. They showed me how easily I was discouraged, and how unworthy a successor I should be to that good mother whose fine, independent character I longed to emulate. My ambition of fifteen was to be self-sustained as she was; as free from all trammels of fashion and custom; yet had I been avowing myself sick already of the home-training under her eye and example, and wearying for a larger sphere wherein to exercise those faculties which yet could not stand alone amid their narrow duties.

This outbreak of mine, so sincerely repented since, was not without its good results. It drew my mother and me closer together, and broke down the screen that had hitherto interposed between our hearts. Many a tale did I listen to which has come back to me in later years with a sanctifying strength; many a quaint shred of actual experience did I treasure up and bring forth in time of need. Insensibly, too, I exchanged the futile, dreamy, inner life I had been leading for one of higher feeling. I learned that it is worthier and greater to do the duty God has set before us than to aspire after that for which he has provided other and stronger hands. My mother's teaching by parables went home to my heart when drier lessons would have utterly failed; but even they

could not always keep it from wandering after vague phantoms of happiness which should crown the unsatisfying present time; and though I began to take some pleasure in my round of duties, yet at intervals there would arise moments of rebellious disgust, during which I flew with added zest to the old books, and neglected every thing else. Soon, however, followed self-condemnation and confession to my mother, whose tenderness and judgment I now trusted with implicit faith.

"Be assured, Kathie," she would say, "that the upbringing God is giving you is the one of all others to fit you for your future life. Self-denial, patience, and industry never come amiss; you may have more need of them some day than you have now. Take the present as God sends it, in all trust and humility."

And I endeavored to do so; but an inward glow had much to do with my patience. I had a fanciful familiar who made golden tracery over the dull, prosaic aspect of my daily life; who exalted my quiet mother into a heroine of social virtue, and my pretty sisters into fairy creatures. It was at this time, on Sunday afternoons, when every body was gone to church and I kept house, that I began to string rhymes together and to weave foolish stories out of my wayward imagination. I enjoyed those brief Sabbath hours as our first parents might have enjoyed a return to Paradise after their expulsion.

IX.

About seven weeks after the circumstances just detailed, the clouds began to break, and the morning mists cleared off. There came for me a totally unexpected invitation to spend a month at my grandmother Brande's house at Crofton. In spite of effort and will, my health, never strong, had during some time past been gradually sinking, until nothing was left of me but a pale, gray shadow, with large brown eyes.

I knew my mother watched me secretly: she thought—and I thought—that my thread of life was nearly spun from the reel; but the chilly, matter-of-fact epistle of our kinswoman, indited in a strong, manly hand, revealed a glimpse of a renewed, invigorated life.

"Only give me change—give me freedom—and I shall live," I said: "even pain—even struggle—any thing but this slow stagnation."

It was settled, therefore, that I should go to Crofton. It was a chance for me, and I grasped at it very eagerly. Life was new to me: I did not wish to die yet; not till some glory had come over its blank places. My mother—I know not what was in her mind, what hopes or what fears—hurried forward the preparations for my departure, and I helped her with a will that must have seemed selfish; but the instinct of self-preservation was alive within me, and I did not pause to think of her. Yet when it came to the actual parting, I found it no light thing to leave home and every one who loved me, to go among strangers.

It was a journey of forty miles to Crofton, and this I undertook alone, one bright May morning, on the outside of the coach which passed through Eversley. There was a swelling in my throat for some time after we had got beyond Westgate; but soon the changing scene, the exhilarating rapidity of motion, and, above all, the full freight of hope I carried in my heart, drove away sorrow, and I began to look around.

It was not a beautiful country through which we traveled; but with its spring face on, any place is pleasant. The sun came out in fitful gleams, touching the emerald larches, which stood out distinctly against backgrounds of dark wood, and making broad shields of light on the stretches of meadow-land, while the far-away wolds lay dusk in shadow. As I watched and pondered, all in my nature that was akin to beauty or poetry sprang up into vigorous life. From the brow of a steep hill, where the coach staid to leave a pas-

senger, I caught the last view of the three towers of Eversley Minster, nearly thirty miles away—gray masses against a paler gray.

As, in the afternoon, we drew near to the end of the journey, both the scene and the weather changed. The road wound over a vast moor, with here and there a few stunted trees breaking its level, and patches of golden gorse coming into bloom. From the elevation of this moor the sea was visible; and with its expanse, lost in hazy cloud in the distance, entered into my mind a vague idea of Eternity —the Unseen—the Illimitable.

The afternoon was chill and damp; the water lay leaden-hued and sullen like a nether sky, while its plaintive, continuous moan came drifting on the slow air over the black moorland. My spirits went down—down to zero.

At last, by a steep and stony roadway, we entered the long, straggling street of a paltry market-town. The coach stopped at the door of an inn which looked as if it were falling into disrepute, so forlorn was the aspect of its hostess, so dejected that of the lame hostler with a straw in his mouth.

Here I left the coach, and was received by a gaunt woman in black, who had been waiting for me. She came forward ejaculating "Humph!" and eyed me with any thing but a reassuring expression of countenance. I returned her gaze, and should probably have said "Humph!" too, but I was very small, very cold, and very hungry, quite unequal to a single-handed contest with that huge icicle in the mourning bonnet. My little trunk having been made over to the care of a man with a carrier's cart, my grandmother's woman seized my hand, and we set off to walk to Crofton at a pace which soon left me no thought except for my extreme weariness. She strode along without rest or pause, admonishing me to put my best foot foremost, and never lightening the way with any word of cheer or welcome. She kept her grim face set like one of the stone visages on the Minster walls,

that peered into my bed-room at home: ever since, she has been associated in my mind with those weather-beaten goblins.

It was full two miles from the place where the coach stopped to Crofton, but my grandmother's house stood first as we approached the village, inclosed in a large garden, green and shady. The lilacs and laburnums were out, and the budding sweet-briers filled the air with spicy fragrance.

I had just an impression of retirement and luxuriant vegetation on my mind, when my guide led me through an open door, across a hall checkered in diamonds of black and white stone, and into a bright little drawing-room, where I found myself in the presence of my grandmother. She was reading when we entered, but hastily pushed away her book, and stretched forth a hand, tremulous in spite of herself; I put mine into it, and when she had kissed me coldly on the cheek, she put me gently away, and turned to the fire without speaking. The woman in black coughed, and my grandmother looked up.

"It is a pity, Sharpe; he might have done so much better," said she, without any apparent reference to the subject under consideration, namely, myself. Sharpe assented gruffly, and glared down upon me from her majestic altitude like the ogres in old story-books. I began to feel excessively uncomfortable. My grandmother drew me toward the fire, felt my hands, which were as cold as stone, and bade me warm myself.

"She is a poor bit of a thing; it is scarcely possible she can be fifteen years old," she remarked, in a soliloquizing tone, regarding me meantime as if I were a piece of inanimate matter. "If she is like her mother, it is more than ever a marvel to me what my son could see in her to admire."

"Men are so odd," suggested Sharpe, with a view to throwing light on the question. It flashed into my youthful

mind to wonder whether any body had been found *odd* enough to marry her. Nobody had.

While undergoing my grandmother's scrutiny, I scanned her face. She appeared to be about sixty-five years old, was tall and stately in figure, but of a strong, harsh, unprepossessing countenance; her brows were heavy and black; her features large and swollen with pride. I imagine that our critical examinations were mutually unpleasing, for I was soon dismissed.

The woman in black, who all this time had stood chafing her hands by the door, was ordered to take me up stairs and make me ready for tea. I found it ill submitting to her needless and obtrusive services, and was rather chafed in temper when reconducted to the parlor door. She bade me "get in," and advised me to be on my best behavior, as my grandmother was very particular. Thus encouraged, I stumbled awkwardly and shyly into the room, and was not surprised at being told I had no manners.

My grandmother was not alone when I entered: a little elderly lady, in a bonnet and cloak, occupied the sofa. The moment she saw me, she half rose, pressed her hands together, and gasped spasmodically.

"There, Bootle, that will do; we appreciate your sentiments to the very core of our hearts," said my kinswoman, frowning upon her from those angerful eyes of hers. "Don't make a scene, pray; if you are going to be lachrymose, take the child away, and cry over her up stairs: I know you are longing to do it."

And, to my intense surprise, I was hustled out of the room, and conveyed by the little old lady to the top of the house. She ushered me into a large room, where a fire was burning, or rather smouldering, in the grate, and bidding me take one chair, deposited herself on another; then turning up her dress to save it from being scorched, she planted her feet on the fender. I wondered who she could be, that took posses-

sion of me as a piece of rightful property: not my aunt Aurelia, surely—she looked as old as my grandmother.

"They are very cold, my dear," said she, nodding at her feet, "very cold—pinched." I gave the fire a poke, and made a blaze, for which she checked me: "Don't, child; it spoils the complexion. Hand me that screen, please!" I obeyed. "Now don't be impatient; you will know all in good time. I was sure it was to be so, and it makes me happy—very happy. When Mrs. Brande has made up her mind to say a thing, she says it; or to do a thing, she does it; or to go any where, she goes to her point at once—as the crow flies, straight across the country."

The old lady spoke in short, jerking sentences, each emphasized by a nod of her head. I entertained doubts of her sanity, she was so very queer-looking—not to say unpleasant or ugly. She wore a front of pale drab curls, the centre one drooping over her forehead, and many others piled aloft; her features were very small and withered, full of lines and fine wrinkles; her eyes light blue; her teeth prominent, and her complexion dull as parchment, and as colorless. Her dress was remarkable for the brilliance of its ill-assorted colors, and its general fluttering effect, which gave me to understand that Miss Bootle had not yet abandoned her pretensions to juvenility and fascination.

"Oh, Charlie!" exclaimed she, suddenly; "wee, pet Charlie!" and she began tearing off her bonnet and cloak in frantic haste, bewildering me more and more every minute. She cast a cap highly decorated with pink ribbons on her head, twisted a lace pelerine over her shoulders, and then bade me come away and be introduced to her sanctum. We descended to the first floor and went down a long passage. At the outside of a door at the end of it she paused, and said mysteriously, "In this room your father learned his lessons when he was a little boy. I taught him, and your Aunt Aurelia too. I am your grandmother's companion now."

She admitted me into a dull, unfurnished apartment, which was henceforth a haunted chamber to me. As she entered, a little white kitten sprang from the couch, and ran to meet her with a cry of pleasure peculiar to pet kittens. She stooped down, and it crept into her arms, patted her face with its gloves on, and showed satisfaction in every way of which it was capable.

"You see, my dear, something loves me; nice, wee Charlie does, bless him!" cried she, fondling the pretty soft thing in the most affectionate way. "He is *my own;* he knows my step and my voice, and does not care that I am ugly. When I have been chilled down stairs—shivering—I come up here, and Charlie quite warms me. He is a comfort to me—a very great comfort."

She put him on the couch, and laid her face on the cushion. The kitten crept up, and made a dash at her cap, which he clawed off, and then he attacked her curls, which were presently reduced to the state and roughness of tow. All the time she continued to address him by the most caressing terms. He was her treasure, her lammie, her darling, her sweet sweeting; yet, ludicrous as these endearments were as applied to that snowball of a kitten, there was something inexpressibly pathetic about them too, which raised the poor companion many degrees in my estimation. Charlie begged play for a long while; he darted round the room, scuttled up the window curtains, hid behind chairs and in empty book-shelves, while through all his manœuvres his mistress followed him with an agility quite laughable and surprising. This exercise over, she rang the bell, and a servant entered with a cup.

"Charlie's milk, Jane," said Miss Bootle.

"Yes, ma'am, I've brought it;" and the cup being placed on the window-seat, Charlie jumped up, plunged his little mouth into it, and was oblivious of both of us for five minutes.

Meanwhile Miss Bootle produced a round basket lined with

blue wadded silk, and having two long strings attached to the handle. I wondered what she was going to do with it; when Charlie had finished his supper, I saw. Being fully replenished, he was no longer frisky, and submitted to be put into the basket, where he coiled himself round, blinking drowsily and licking his lips. His mistress then opened the window, and proceeded to lower him into the garden very gently, but swiftly; when the strings were all run out, she gave them a little jerk, and fastened them by a loop to the button of the blind.

"There, my dear," said she, "perhaps you never saw that done before. I took the idea from the Bible—St. Paul let down by the wall in a basket. It answers remarkably well. While we are at tea, Charlie takes his little constitutional trots about the shrubbery, and prances up his favorite holly-bush. When I come up again I shall tug at the strings. I can tell by the weight whether he is in the basket; if not, I call until he comes and gets in, then I draw him up. Don't you think it immensely clever of him, my dear?"

I replied that I thought it perfectly delightful; whereupon she kissed me impetuously, and called me a treasure. At this moment Sharpe appeared, and proclaimed severely that tea had been waiting three minutes and a half. Miss Bootle hastily settled her cap. "Shall I do? am I all straight?" she asked; and without giving me time to say "No," seized my hand, and pranced down stairs as if she had imbibed some of Charlie's vivacity.

Mrs. Brande was seated at the table when we appeared, with a white-headed man-servant in attendance. I took a seat beside her, and the companion placed herself opposite, her face alight with smiles, its wrinkles even half smoothed out.

My grandmother, happening to look toward her, attacked her with asperity. "Bootle, you are intoxicated! Why do you come to tea with your hair all touzled in that way?"

she asked, in her deep voice; "what a silly thing you are with that ridiculous kitten. I shall order Sharpe to drown it; she will like the office."

"Oh don't, please!" cried I, dismayed, while a tear trickled down the poor old companion's nose; "it is the nicest little cat I ever saw."

The man-servant, who was filling the tea-pot from the urn, paused and coughed, and Miss Bootle looked aghast, while I, in blissful ignorance of the storm I might arouse, reiterated my petition for Charlie.

"Tush! child, you take me in earnest," said my grandmother, placably; "Bootle may wear her kitten for a bow in her bonnet, if she likes."

The tear vanished, and we all breathed freely once more.

When the companion had recovered from the temporary shock to her feelings, she proceeded to narrate some of the gossip which she had collected during her afternoon's walk; especially she dilated on the misfortune which had befallen a neighboring family in the breaking off of the eagerly-desired marriage of one of its many daughters.

My grandmother cut her expressions of regret short. "Stuff, Bootle; don't cant to me; I know the world," was her testy remark. "People never are sorry for the misfortunes of their friends; it is a little pleasant excitement to talk about them."

The companion ventured on a mild dissent, but was instantly frowned into silence.

"Pshaw! Mrs. Froude may be sitting in sackcloth and ashes, and Sibyl may be tearing her red hair at this minute, for any thing *you* care. At all events, their distresses have not taken away your appetite. How many times have you helped yourself to marmalade?"

The poor old lady had a liking for this condiment, and was silent for at least three minutes after the rebuff; but she had a happy elasticity of temper, and soon expanded again.

She looked at me tenderly, heaved a sort of gasping sigh, and said, in an under tone, "This is truly delightful. I feel perfectly comfortable. If I may be pardoned the expression, I may say that I feel like a balloon, or a kite—soaring."

"*Don't* be an idiot, Bootle," snapped my kinswoman; "I wish you would leave that nonsense up stairs with your cat and your curl-papers."

This quite extinguished the little old lady; she put on a deeply aggrieved expression of countenance, and spoke no more. This gave her mistress the opportunity of asking if she were feeling like a balloon in a state of collapse, or a kite without a tail; but no reply was elicited, unless a tear which trickled down her nice, kind old face might be called one.

I had already set down my grandmother as a bitter, cynical, ill-tempered, unlovable woman, and ranged myself as friend and supporter of the companion. When tea was over, the former fell asleep in her chair; Miss Bootle ascertained the fact by coughing gently, and as this did not elicit any rebuke, we were sure she was safe, and escaped up stairs to the school-room.

"Now for bonnie Prince Charlie!" cried the old lady, gayly skipping to the window. She pulled at the strings: "Yes, he is in. Now don't speak, my child; I am nervous about drawing him up; my heart goes pit-a-pat: I don't know what I should do if I upset him."

Very slowly and carefully she drew in the strings, and soon the basket came in sight, with the kitten just waking out of a nap and sticking up his back. She lifted him out carefully, kissed him, and covered him up in a soft woolen shawl kept for the purpose.

"Now, my dear, I am going to put him to sleep for the night, so don't make any noise."

She began to walk about the room, hushing him in her arms as if he had been an infant; singing nursery rhymes in a thin, cracked voice, and purring over him like an old moth-

er cat. Detecting a smile on my face, she stopped and said quietly, "My dear, don't laugh at me. If you live, you may become as lonely and as unlovely as I am. People say that every soul has its fellow, but mine has not found its other half yet, so I suspect I must have been born odd. One must love something, so I am content to love Charlie, who does not despise me because I am old, plain, poor, and dependent."

I felt quite ashamed of myself for seeing any thing absurd in her proceedings, as she resumed her march and her song. Presently she said in a whisper Charlie was going over nicely; then that she feared he showed symptoms of wakefulness; and, finally, that he was fast asleep. She then laid him gently down on the sofa-cushion, kissed, blessed, and covered him up. "There he will sleep till morning, my dear, and when I look in I shall find him sitting at the corner of the table, watching the door. He will have milk; and if it is fine, he will be let down into the garden in his basket; if not, I shall smuggle him into the drawing-room in my apron, and keep him there while I read aloud to your grandmamma. Now come away to my bed-room; I have something else to show you."

I followed, nothing loth, for I greatly preferred the poor companion's society to that of my grim kinswoman. We returned to the attic chamber, and, unlocking the top drawer of an old bureau, Miss Bootle took thence a worn portfolio.

"My dear, do you recognize that portrait?" she asked, mysteriously, offering me a small water-color drawing of a boy in dress between a Highlander and a brigand. I replied that I did not. "You astonish me! Then he must have been changed. It is your father, my dear. I drew it myself."

"Will you tell me something about him, Miss Bootle?"

"He was a good boy, my dear, but not much like others.

I should say he would have been an excellent and valuable character but for a peculiarity he had. I should call him a boy of one idea: some chimera would take possession of him, and to it he sacrificed every thing for the time being. I always wondered whether this habit grew upon him or wore off."

"I think it grew upon him."

"Indeed! I feared so. It was the source of much vexation to his mother. With his fine talents, he might have risen high in his profession; but they were so ill regulated."

"I loved my father very dearly: he was always kind to us."

"He could not be actively unkind to any thing; but neglect is sometimes as bad in its effects. My dear, I would not hurt your feelings on any account, but truth is truth, and fact is fact. There might have been a reconciliation with his mother if he had been less absorbed. Though she might be in the wrong, as a son it was his place to make the first step toward it."

"Why did they quarrel?"

"There was no quarrel, so to speak, but a gradual estrangement. Then his marriage was a deep offense; she never forgave it."

"My mother is good and clever. She kept things together: I do not know what would have become of us but for her," I said, hastily, for I was really hurt at the implied reproach.

"I am sure she is good. I always said to Mrs. Brande that she was exactly the wife for her son: so homely, careful, and full of thought for others. But she was mortified that he did not consult her. Would you like to have that portrait, my dear?"

I thanked her, but declined it; for, though it might remind her of a beloved pupil, as I remembered my father only a gray-haired man, it would be valueless to me. She restored it, therefore, to the portfolio and the bureau.

At eight o'clock, to my great surprise, Sharpe arrived, and marched me off to bed. I came to open strife with her almost immediately, for she would treat me as if I had not the proper use of my limbs or reasoning faculties. The result of my demonstration was that her services were withdrawn, and I was left in the free exercise of my independence. Thus ended my first night away from home.

X.

The next morning I was up and out by dawn, though, for the present, my researches were confined to the garden and shrubberies. The latter were prettily embellished with wild flowers, which grew under the trees and in sheltered spots luxuriantly. I gathered a few, and having made them into a posy, laid them by my grandmother's plate on the breakfast table. When she came in, she took them in her hand and remarked, "So your mother's daughter has taste;" but she threw them aside, and they were swept away by Sharpe with the breakfast crumbs. The meal over, all the establishment came in to prayers, which were read by Miss Bootle. It was only a short ceremony, but too long for Charlie: he did not relish his constrained position in his mistress's apron, and having made his escape, he ran up her back, where, just below the waist, he found what seemed an eligible place for taking repose. Perhaps he did not poise himself carefully, or else the cushion was less substantial than it looked, for he fell with an obtrusive rustle to the carpet, and was seized by the nape of his neck by Sharpe, who shook him viciously, and without intermission, till she rose from her knees, when she looked perfectly unconscious and austerely devout.

The servants being all gone out of the room, Miss Bootle brought forth a large volume of very dry theological exterior, and prepared to read aloud; but her patroness bade her be quiet and hold her tongue, as she had something to talk about to me. She then proceeded to ask multitudinous questions

about those at home, our way of life, and our prospects, especially Stephen's. She received my details with short grunts of approbation, and once remarked that my mother had more worldly wisdom than she had given her credit for. It happened frequently that, in speaking of what was past, my father's name recurred, and where any allusion suggested the poverty of our home, she winced visibly; and I detected a dim remorse in her stony eyes as I spoke of the necessities his death entailed upon us. She continued to hover about the subject for a long time after I ceased to speak, asking desultory questions, and returning again and again to the theme of her son's death and its consequences.

Sharpe's entry with a pile of coarse sewing broke in upon the subject, and it was not then resumed. I had a task portioned out to me, and Miss Bootle was called upon to read aloud.

Thrice during the morning was sentence of death passed upon Charlie; once for his behavior at prayers, a second time for making free with a ball of worsted on the carpet, and a third for springing at the pendent curl of Miss Bootle's front while she was reading. The bell even was ordered to be rung for Sharpe to execute the sentence; but as I instantly showed symptoms of tears, he was reprieved, and condemned to perpetual banishment from the drawing-room. I had quite adopted the little animal into my affections, for he seemed the only free and happy thing about the house.

The hours were very long, for Miss Bootle's book was dry and her voice monotonous—so teasingly monotonous that I could not abstract my thoughts from it, though I was wearying all the while to have my feet on the cool, pleasant grass, and to hear, nearer at hand, the voice of that mighty sea whose plaintive moan I had heard on the moorland, and in the dead of the night. The whole of that day, however, I was kept in-doors. Miss Bootle and I revolved between the drawing-room, the school-room, and the attic, amusing our-

selves as we could, but chiefly with Charlie. I had asked for a book, but, being accommodated with "The History of the War," I had soon relinquished it as unattractive reading. The latter part of the afternoon we spent in turning over the contents of the portfolio, where I saw portraits of Miss Bootle's friends, relatives, and pupils, who all bore a strong family resemblance to each other; they all possessed blue eyes, more or less globular, Greek outlines of feature, and a uniform insipidity, or, rather, lack of expression.

When we at last descended to the drawing-room, toward tea-time, my grandmother was not alone: she had a visitor, who, as I gathered from subsequent conversation, was the curate of Crofton, Mr. Mayne. He made way for us to approach the fire, but I was bid impatiently to take my place at the table, and be quiet. I instantly obeyed, though not much daunted by mere ill-temper. Nature did not make me originally of a feeble or cowardly soul, though time and other things have much subdued it since then.

As I had nothing to do but to eat my bread and butter, I made private reflections, observations, and speculations on what I saw and heard. The curate was a young man, recently ordained, who, as I judged from his talk, held very lofty views of the duties and responsibilities of his office: something in his words warmed and stirred my heart, as did the noble thoughts and aspirations that I met in the old plays. Still I saw that, beneath what was good, and spiritual, and self-denying in him, there lurked vast ambition, and much restless, vivid, ever-increasing dissatisfaction with his narrow position. I liked his countenance, though its features were marked and irregular; it was the stamp of strength and purpose in it that pleased me, and perhaps also some chord, unsounded till then in my mind, sympathized with his ardent, rebellious, uncurbed temperament. I marveled what had made him a priest of peaceful times; for he seemed, at heart, as eager for strife and conquest as ever was youthful soldier who has scented glory on his first battle-field.

To all he said my grandmother listened with an air of polite endurance—she thought him visionary and unpractical; the poor companion, to whom he was very courteous, was tearfully and gustily responsive. She assured him, from time to time, that she understood him, and agreed with him. There was an every-day side to his character of less interest than his better self. In speaking of individuals and circumstances, he could be sarcastic and merciless: he had an instinctive repulsion for all false-seemings, meannesses, and bland, social hypocrisies; he testified no pity for weakness, no sympathy for repentant error. My grandmother, with all her harshness, was scarcely less genial than he when he got among the follies and foibles of people whom they knew.

XI.

The following morning, immediately after prayers, when I saw the work-basket and big volume about to come into action again, I took my courage in my two hands and preferred a request for permission to go out. Both grandmamma and Miss Bootle had objections to raise, but I contrived to overrule them all, and to extort a reluctant leave of absence until noon.

In his rare moments of social expansion, wonderful tales of his birth-place had I heard my father tell. There the trees in the woods were taller and of fuller foliage than elsewhere; the birds that built in them were the finest of choristers; the garden flowers boasted richer odors and more glowing tints; there the sea raved more boisterously in winter weather, and in summer time rolled more wooingly up the sands than on other coasts. I made no allowance for the bright medium of boyish recollection through which he viewed it; and, finding the sparkle of the May sun over all, I was not disappointed very much.

But there were no cliffs, no beetling rocks hanging darkly over the inflowing tide, each with its awful legend of ship-

wreck, its echoes of wild cries of drowning men coming out of low-browed caverns with freezing whisper. As the sea was there, it touched me with no awe. Far out, it lay still as a lake; and nearer, where the waters came tumbling over a reef of black rocks, it dashed its spray playfully into the air, and then came rolling, spreading, gliding up to my very feet. There was a single ship in sight; its sails, which caught the sunshine, looked like the outspread wings of some great sea-bird; and a few tiny fishing-boats, rocked by the slow motion of the waves, lay mere specks on the shadowed water. I watched them for a little while, and saw how the drifting clouds moved along the face of the deep, chasing the sunshine before them, and then parting and letting it break through; never repeating their forms or effects, but wandering in infinite variety. Then, with the eternal sea-chant in my ears, and the wind in my teeth, I moved on under the range of low sand-hills that fringed the beach. There were points in the distance—rocks, I felt sure, from the clear outline they cut against the sky—and in the hope of reaching the nearer of the two, I pressed forward, though the breeze was both cold and strong; already it seemed to quicken the vital current in my veins, and to give me the spring of renewed life. I walked forward for an hour, and then my feet began to lag, for the points seemed still as far off as ever; but, not liking to yield my whim altogether, I turned my back to the wind to rest and take breath before proceeding.

While I stood thus, watching the foam-flecked tide creeping momently higher, a voice behind me said, "You are not like the crows; they always face the wind."

I turned round startled: it was Mr. Mayne who spoke.

"Where are you bound for—the Nab?" he asked.

I answered by pointing at the high rock.

"I thought so; but you must turn back with me, for it is seven miles away, and the tide would carry you off long before you could reach it. Come."

I was very reluctant to accept my disappointment, and asked several questions as to the attainability of the Nab at any time.

"You can not reach it within half a mile, even during the neap tides," was his reply. "The rock rises sheer from the water, perpendicular as a wall. It is very dangerous to vessels off the coast in foggy weather; many ships have been lost there. It is the pleasantest to view from a distance."

I turned back and trudged homeward beside him, finding him pleasant company; for he was not too proud to answer my trivial questions, neither had he any coldness or fantastic reserve of manner to repel a child. He told me of a wreck which had happened during the preceding winter, and had several stories which gave that low, reef-bound coast a darker interest than its humble features would have led me to suspect.

"And why do the rooks face the wind?" I asked, when the sea-stories were done.

"Because they dislike to have their feathers ruffled," was the reply. "They resemble most of us in that respect. I think, though, our difficulties would be less if we fronted them steadily, instead of turning away or trying to cower into the nearest shelter. Do you understand me, little girl?"

I glanced up into his thoughtful face, and answered that I did, and then he talked on again, sometimes plainly, sometimes mystically. I could not follow him always, and seeing this, he descended to my level.

When we came to the garden gate, he shook hands, saying, "We are friends, child, are we not?"

I responded gayly, "Yes;" and very proud of the title my little heart was.

As I entered the house, grandmamma met me, and asked if it was not Mr. Mayne with whom I had just parted. I replied that it was.

"And, pray, what did he find to talk about to a child like you?" she asked.

"Oh! many things; the sea, and birds, and thoughts that people have on unseen matters. I like him."

"That is very probable; strange, unpractical man that he is," was my grandmother's comment. "It very often happens that clever men like him are attracted by what is homely in young girls. Go and take off your bonnet."

XII.

If my grandmother's household had been regulated by clockwork, it could scarcely have moved more mechanically than it did. Order and punctuality were with her cardinal virtues, and as I cautiously avoided transgressing either, I gained gradually on her good opinion. At first it was impossible to avoid seeing that she treated me with a scarcely veiled contempt, but after the lapse of a week she began to talk to me freely both of my father, my aunt Aurelia, and herself. She was a very proud old woman, and had met with severe disappointments in life, which her peculiar temper magnified into perpetual wrongs; there was an especial soreness on the subject of her son's marriage. I may be forgiven for feeling that my mother was far more of the true gentlewoman than she who despised her, little as she had lived in society, and full of small cares and economies as her whole experience had been.

One evening after tea, when Miss Bootle and I were thinking of making our retreat to the freer regions of the schoolroom, my grandmother bade me remain and hear something she had to say to me.

"Kathie, I am going to send you to school, that you may learn to be of some definite use to your family," she began. I colored, and my heart throbbed fast as she continued. "It was with that view I sent for you to Crofton; I wanted to see what sort of stuff you were made of."

She paused, and looked me full in the face; I did not seek to evade her steady, passionless scrutiny, but returned her gaze with one as calm, while my pulse settled again to its even beat, and I listened intently for what was to come next. It was not particularly complimentary.

"I imagine you to possess the elements of a plain, sensible, commonplace character, and you will do respectably when your spirit is tamed; at present, you have too much to get forward comfortably, for you would always be coming in contact with other people's prejudices, and as you have your own way to make in the world, the sooner your temper ranges with your fortunes the better."

I ventured to hint at the possibility of my mother's objecting to my leaving home for long together.

"Nonsense, child! Don't be a goose!" interrupted my grandmother, testily. "She will not be so foolish as to stand in your light. It is something for you to be able to earn your own bread decently; you have nothing but work to look forward to, and if you are well taught yourself you can educate your sisters—have a school, in short, which may prove an independence for all of you."

That was a promising truth, and immediately a vision of what I might one day do for my mother rose up before my mind's eye. "I should like to be a teacher," was my prompt reply.

"Of course you will like it; it is the one course for which you are fitted," said my grandmother, in a cold, disenchanting tone; "you seem to have average ability, some perseverance, and some energy. You will not be easily turned back from your purposes, neither will you weakly sicken over a monotonous duty. I do not see that you are either sensitive or enthusiastic, so there will be the less disappointment for you, as you will not be apt to look beyond your sphere, and so to neglect the mediocre happiness that lies under your hand."

As my grandmother with calm deliberation enunciated these opinions, a conviction stole into my mind that she was describing, not what she thought I was, but what she wished me to be. Perhaps she read in my eyes a protest against her judgment, for she added, in a severe tone, "Nothing is more frivolous or ridiculous than an ambitious, restless woman. She is a sin against the unity of nature—an anomaly; Kathie, you understand me. Remember, your work will rise before you day by day, and that, to be safe and respectable, you must adhere steadily to the beaten tracks of life like other people. Mr. Mayne would be a far happier man if he were not so visionary; while he is flying after Utopian schemes, substantials escape him."

Miss Bootle ventured to coincide in this sentiment, but was instantly snubbed into silence.

"If," my grandmother resumed, "if your mother should object to my plan for sending you to school, which I do not anticipate, I shall keep you under my own eye. I will not have you wasted. Bootle may teach you, if she has not forgotten every thing herself; and if she has, we will send her off and find somebody else."

The persecuted companion looked meekly and tearfully surprised. "Oh, madam, pray consider it again!" cried she, plaintively; "thirty-nine years have I lived in this house—"

"Well, what of that?" snapped her patroness. "You do not expect that I shall keep you, and pay you money, when you are of no use?" The poor old lady retired to the window to weep unseen, and to bathe Charlie's coat with her tears; I do not think even he could have comforted her under the threatened dismissal.

"I shall write to your mother to-morrow, Kathie, so if you have any thing to say, you had better say it at once," added my kinswoman, looking grimly satisfied at having made somebody miserable.

"I should like to go to school, and in the mean time to have a complete holiday," I boldly responded. My grandmother slightly protruded her nether lip, and asked what I meant. "To be as idle as I please; to come and go when and where I like."

"A pretty demand, truly; but perhaps not very unreasonable, all things considered. Well, you may have a rest, and Sharpe, who has nothing to do, can walk out with you."

"Thank you, grandmamma, but I should not quite like such a giant's castle handmaiden for my companion."

A grim smile relaxed my relative's features. "I wish Sharpe heard you," said she; "you must have her or nobody; I can not spare Bootle to go gadding about the country, though I dare say she would like it." I replied that solitary excursions had a singular charm for me, and that I had no fear of going out alone.

"Humph! I hope your brain is not filled with a farrago of nonsense! There, get away, and do what you like for a fortnight, only let me hear no more about it. Bootle, put that cat out of the room, and do something sensible."

Armed with my grandmother's permit to enjoy myself, I really did it, and found being at Crofton extremely pleasant. I liked the garden quietness, where nobody came but myself, and the lonely sea-shore, and the bleak moorland. It was, perhaps, not the most healthy way of life for a child; but ah! how delightful I thought it. First, there was that, to me, rarest of luxuries, complete idleness, a peaceful folding of the hands—a dreamy vacancy. My mind took a fair aspect in the spring sunshine; colored by external influences, it grew brighter, stronger, happier, and more hopeful. I saw before me a future of some promise: the opportunity of mental culture, and the consequent opening out of new mines of enjoyment; girls like myself for companions, friends possibly; the capability to work worthily, and release from the blind, monotonous toil of ignorance—I know not what.

Day-dreams all! There was, too, a weft of even brighter gold than these gleaming across the deader tints of the mingled warp, but it was so light, airspun, and intangible, that, but for its beauty, and its genial influence on my temper, it would scarce deserve a name at all. Imagination is amenable to no rules: grandmamma said mine was ill-regulated, and perhaps she was right; nevertheless, I would not have exchanged it for much solid worldly pomp and vanities. It was a fortune inexhaustible, and thus early, nothing had warned me that it might be drawn on too extravagantly.

I travel but slowly over the preface to my life; I love to remember this time, when I hovered only on the threshold of the storied years, waiting and longing until Fate should give me the true "Open Sesame!" and cause the gates to fall back before my eager steps. If Fancy hung those secret chambers with too gorgeous tapestries, and accumulated within them more treasures and more joys than could be counted over in many life-times, was she to blame? If she altogether ignored the skeleton-closet, and filled the house with airs of perpetual summer, was it unwise?

No matter how these things appear to initiated eyes; let those who have possession of dreamland keep it: I verily believe it is worth the fee-simple of many landed estates. Leave to the vision of youth the glory of its hopeful fancies. Practical and disappointed people may hold to their transient realities, but they may chance to find that in the long run they are of intrinsically less value than the mind's wealth they endeavor to despise as emptiness and vanity.

XIII.

When my mother's answer to grandmamma's proposal for my education arrived, I was not surprised to find that she objected to my being sent to school on the plea that my health was precarious; but she assented to my remaining, for the present, at Crofton, which was the alternative stipu-

lated for. I was rather glad at first, but soon found that I had no great reason to congratulate myself on the change, for self-guidance, independence, and holidays were gone for all intents and purposes. Grandmamma said that I had no judgment, and must have no will of my own. My education was in a manner to begin, and poor Miss Bootle being, after trial, found too easy and perfectly incompetent, her place was supplied by another lady who had a theory, and believed in the strengthening power of the abstruse sciences as applied to the feminine idiosyncrasy. I was accordingly put through a severe course of them, to the general confusion of my mind, and the very, very frequent reddening of my eyes. Grandmamma upheld the theory with her authority, Mr. Mayne encouraged me to be submissive and do my best, and dear Miss Bootle, who staid on sufferance, while Miss Palmer lodged in the village ready to supplant her at a moment's notice, consoled me, and endeavored to elucidate the mysteries of hard words, which fenced my studies like a *chevaux de frise*.

Ah! what pains they took to make me good, and elegant, and clever! I wonder they were not discouraged; I often was. My head used to throb, and my face to burn; I had bad dreams at night, and woke crying over a pitiable haze of troubles: my brain was always at work, waking and sleeping; for, being conscientious, I strove with my difficulties, and did battle with obstinate lessons, while I felt myself growing more stupid and incapable every day. My greatest satisfaction was to sit on the school-room floor with Charlie in my lap; but even then my hand always held before my dazed eyes the "elements" of something. The sea had lost its charm for me. Its mournful sounds confused me till I was almost idiotic; when I did go down to the shore, it was only to sit and watch the foam lapping the golden sand, and to cry quietly to myself. My mind was then absolutely vacant, unless the gnawing pain of inanition that

possessed it might be called a tenant. I never thought of mentioning this in my letters home; I was told that it was my duty to make an effort to learn; and besides, I was not given to complaint; so I carried a French Prayer-book to church, and read the daily lessons in an Italian Bible, and followed, as far as it lay in my power, the path of wisdom by Miss Palmer laid down.

At length the theory produced its practical results. The little strength and spirits that I had at first imbibed soon fell away again, and left me more weak and ailing than before. Grandmamma was angry, and tried to spur me on by sharp, sarcastic speeches, and constantly repeating her conviction that I was either hopelessly dull or irreclaimably idle; Miss Palmer lamented that, notwithstanding all her exertions, I was painfully deficient in arithmetic and the more occult branches of education; even Miss Bootle reproached me with tears and caresses. It disappointed every body that, with such advantages, I was not turning out a shining character; but they did not give me up yet; instead, they applied the screw tighter than ever. I tried hard to satisfy them, and in the effort broke down altogether. Six months after my arrival at Crofton, I lay a prostrate, helpless invalid, condemned by the doctors, and watched over with angry anxiety by grandmamma.

My mother came to me in haste, and great indeed was the comfort of her presence. But she staid not long; I could not be removed, neither could the little ones at home be left. They promised to send for her again if—if there was *any change*, and I saw her go with an apathy too blank even for tears. For a little while grandmamma's friends brought their condolences and their hopes; but as I lingered, lingered on through tedious weeks and months, the excitement passed, and my shaded room saw visitors but rarely. Even grandmamma tired of my pale, mute presence, and resumed all her usual habits of receiving company. I suffered

at times extremely; but Miss Bootle said I bore my cross with patience: my prayer was that I might not bear it long, for it was exceeding heavy. They talked about me without reserve—especially the companion and the nurse—as if they imagined physical weakness and pain must dull my mind. But it was not so: in that calm of a sick-room the clouds were falling away from it, and leaving it clear.

One night — how well I remember it! — Miss Bootle, Sharpe, and the nurse talked softly together; I had been dreaming, and heard their voices between sleeping and waking.

"We can not wish her to live: her sufferings are very great, and the doctors give no hope of cure." It was the poor old companion who spoke.

"Poor lile bairn, I love her like my own," said the nurse; "what a sweet, meek face she has: it looks oft as if she were in heaven already!"

Miss Bootle sobbed, and called me a "poor dear!"

"She might live to be quite an old woman in this way: better one day and worse another, like Miss Donner at the Bank," said Sharpe.

"But her mind is gone. I hope it will please God to take the child to himself rather than visit her with such affliction," returned Miss Bootle; and, coming near the bed to look at me, she perceived that I had heard all.

"And I hope so too," I added, with a smile; and then the tears came. It was sad to die so young, but sadder still the prospect of such a future!

Through two tedious years I lay in that quiet room. From my pillow I could see the branches bent by winter snows; budding into deep, shadow-waving green, fading to autumn brown and November bare. I had no change of days: it was a long Sabbath, any hour of which might have passed me forward to the Eternal one. Four times my mother journeyed from Eversley to see me, and four times we bade each other what we deemed might be a last adieu.

I regard these two years as part of my education—the best part, perhaps. Such strong, happy thoughts kept me company sometimes. Released from the cramping-irons of that dreadful theory, my heart and mind had room to grow. Nature, overwrought, gave way: left to herself, after exacting the due amount of pains and penalties for her broken laws, she began to revive in my veins. Long before others noticed the change, I felt the life-current rising and glowing in my limbs; writhing pain and pitiable weakness left me; insensibly my feet receded from the shadowy land on whose confines they had hovered so long, and my spirits plumed themselves for a new flight. It was almost as one rising from the dead; the doctors regarded me as a miracle, and the nurse said prophetically, sure I was preserved for a purpose.

From my sick-bed I was, at length, transferred to a couch in the school-room, where I was kept for weeks clad in grave and antique raiment, and petted with small attentions from every body. Grandmamma's friends came to see me again, and again sent messages; but my most frequent and favorite visitor was Mr. Mayne. He always brought some amusing story which diverted my thoughts; he had a cheerful voice, and the pleasant but rare faculty of soothing nervous irritability such as mine. I was deeply grateful to him, but do not remember that I troubled him with many thanks. He came and went as he liked: at first only a quiet influence, but almost, ere I knew it, a necessity to me; for if he staid away three days together, I always contrived to fret myself with foolish and frivolous anxieties; which, however, his quick step on the gravel below the school-room window speedily exorcised.

XIV.

As soon as I was sufficiently recovered to go down stairs, to my great dismay the theory began to be spoken of again, but good Dr. Martin annihilated it at a single blow.

"She is deplorably ignorant, Dr. Martin; we must resume her education immediately," said grandmamma.

"At your peril, madam!" cried the physician, startled into plain speaking.

"Then what is to be done? She knows nothing—literally nothing. Miss Palmer's admirable theory had no chance before."

The irascible old gentleman consigned the theory to a nameless limbo. "She will do, madam, if you will let her alone," he added, apologetically: "I suppose she can read and write: when her mind is ready to work, it will work, and will do far more than if it were laced up in any theory whatever. Meddle with it now, and the consequences will be such as I do not care to name."

It was fortunate that a friend so sensible undertook my cause, for every body conspired to pity me for the disadvantages under which I labored. My grandmother contemplated me with a dreary and silent commiseration; Miss Palmer, in full receipt of her salary, came daily, and strove to administer the theory in feeble little bits of conversation; and Miss Bootle improved every opportunity of giving me useful information on trifles that had been familiar to me from my sixth year. I distinctly recollect her laboriously explaining to me that a quadruped was an animal with four legs, like Charlie. By dint of seeing myself so continually pitied, I grew to have an overwhelming sense of my deficiencies: the presence of strangers was painful and confusing to me, and I clung to my couch-corner in the school-room as to a harbor of refuge.

It is probable that I should at length have sunk into a state of physical and mental inertness, pitiable and miserable, had not Mr. Mayne proposed to give me an occasional lesson in such things as I had a taste for. To this grandmamma acceded with a sigh of relief; Miss Palmer and the theory got their dismissal, and I was handed over to the cu-

rate and Miss Bootle, to be taught or let alone, as circumstances appeared to direct. I need scarcely say that this arrangement was perfectly satisfactory to me: I believe it was so to all the parties concerned in it.

I could not have given myself a reason for it then, but I felt glad to be with Mr. Mayne, and to listen to him as he talked to me like the child I was no longer, and yet without appearing to depreciate my understanding. He was as cordial and outspoken as an elder to a younger brother. It is my belief that, at this time, he did not recognize the woman in me at all, but merely a mind that sympathized with his, and responded, like a far-away echo, to his own thoughts and feelings—a receptive vessel for his overflowing fancies—nothing more. I remember one evening especially how he talked to me of himself, while I, half tired with the afternoon's lessons, reclined on the couch by the school-room window. It was twilight among the trees outside, and quite dusk in the room, though the fire sent out fitful glints of light now and then. Miss Bootle sat in the chimney-corner, nursing her cat and dozing, as her custom was, and the curate stood at a corner of the mantel-piece, resting against it, with his face all in shadow, and his hand propping his bent head. Watch as I would, no change of feature was discernible; perhaps the dim hour made him less guarded in expression than he would have been in the brilliantly-lighted drawing-room. There was such a homely quiet in the time and place that most of us might have felt tempted, if our company was congenial, to drop fantastic, conventional restraints, and let our hearts speak out.

"You wonder what is to come of my Utopian schemes, as Mrs. Brande calls them," said he, in answer to a remark of mine. "Perhaps they are moonshine—eighteen people in twenty would so condemn them; for what have I done? Nothing. Which of my fine theories have I accomplished? None. You see I can sneer at them myself. Fate is to me

like that great black rock out yonder to the waves at its base, which dash against it and are driven back by their own force, broken, fretted, chafing, and impotent. I am like a beggar who dreams that he is a king, and wakes to squalor, and hunger, and sordid rags, and turns to sleep again that the vision may come back. One half of my life is dreams, the other regrets. When I was as young as you, I imagined that energy and ability would go all lengths, but it is not so. We can go just so far as circumstances permit, and no farther; they guide, and check, and turn us back. You have but to live ten years longer to subscribe to the verity of this. I could pick you out a score of wise saws that are misquoted every day, which carry a specious truth on the face of them, but at the core are utterly rotten and false. I am waiting now for my lucky accident; I have but to stagnate patiently until it comes."

This was an unusual phase of the curate's humor; he was generally ardent, enthusiastic, and full of hope. I asked if some misfortune had befallen him: he paused on the question before replying.

"Nothing recently; but old wounds have an unpleasant trick of opening now and then," was the answer, when at last it came. "You must know, Kathie, that besides being a dreamer of dreams, I am also a writer of books. In them I have ventured to put forward my so-called Utopian theories; but men raise an outcry against me and say, 'We will none of him! He does not speak with our tongue, or see with our eyes, or think with our thoughts. He has got into tangles and brakes where there are neither tracks nor guide-posts: we dare not, and we will not follow him.'"

"Which, being interpreted, means that you have had no success," said I, quietly.

"Was that your voice speaking out of the gloom, Kathie? It sounded chill: mind, I am not prepared to lose my little disciple."

"Speak on; her spirit is sitting at your feet now, waiting to be taught."

"I like to believe that. I think, Kathie, you and I are something akin; it does me good to see you looking up to me out of your clear, untroubled eyes. You remind me of a sister of mine who died young; she used to listen to me with a wise, reflective little face, and upturned eyes of a calm, tender, cool shade, like yours. She used to try her best to understand me, but her own nature was one of method and obedienee, which puzzled over my wanderings and rebellings as I think you will never do; because, whether you will it or no, your spirit understands and responds to mine. If you were man instead of a weak little child-woman, we might stand as friends and equals; do you feel this, Kathie?"

"I would rather be what I am; I like to look up and rely. Do you put much of yourself into your books?"

"Much of my better self; not my weak, unstable thoughts: those which have least of earth-soil upon them; the angel visitants."

"Should I recognize you in them?"

"Partly. Kathie, I was born and bred in a great manufacturing town, where the whole business and pleasure of existence was to get money. I dread lest the spirit of it may cling to mine: all my aspirations are not pure, all my ambitions not worthy. Sometimes I think that if I had money I might escape into liberty and fuller life. Thus far my luckless ventures have made me only poorer in purse, and no richer in reputation. Is it mean and sordid to think of these things? Look at the matter with your eyes: they must be purer than mine; for with each experience we rub off some bloom and gather some rust."

I was silent: this mind was beyond my gauge. He went on: "You can feel, Kathie, what a perpetually renewed thirst of soul it is to find your best efforts fall forever short of your conception. In all my endeavors I appoint to my-

self an aim, yet I am only like a man drawing a bow at a venture: I have no assurance that I shall reach my mark. How often may an individual of average courage fail before he gives up in despair?"

"You are not that individual; you will never despair."

"But, Kathie, I have despaired."

"For an hour, perhaps, or for a day."

"Be a faithful prophetess to me, little friend."

"When I have any open vision I will tell it to you."

"Kathie, there is this poor consolation for me—though I should myself accomplish nothing, I shall have pioneered the way for those who come after. Out of my chaos of rough-hewn materials some more skillful workman may erect a fair building. All great reformers and all great inventors have found much of their way prepared by the failures of their forerunners."

"All honor to those pioneers, then! Let me predict for you, not the cross only, but the crown also."

"How is it, Kathie, that while even the praise and encouragement of others only depress me, you always elevate and strengthen?"

"It is because I have faith in you."

He had changed his place from the hearth to the window; he stood near me, behind the couch, looking out at the dusk tree-shadows waving against the sky, and quite silent for a few minutes. The fire fell in with an obtrusive crash, and the blaze flamed up, filling the room with light, and throwing the gray, external picture into darkness.

"I must go, my child; good-night!" He stooped and left a kiss on my brow, and was gone. I was still for a little while; the flickering-blaze sank, and left a pensive gloom, through which moved visions of exquisite grace and beauty, visible to me only.

Miss Bootle and Charlie roused up, and forthwith they vanished.

XV.

It was at this time that a literary lady, Miss Alice Wilton by name, came and took lodgings at Crofton, as it was understood for the sake of her health. Her advent made no little commotion among us; it was as if a hawk, intent on prey, had swooped down upon a nest of fledglings hidden in the crevice of a rock. Whence she came was a mystery; people wondered if she were respectable, and consulted together as to whether it would be proper to call upon her. We got her books, and read them, and were dismayed. She was satirical. We saw ourselves, in anticipation, shown up to the ridicule of the general public, with all our innocent little peculiarities thick upon us. The color of her eyes, the make of her gowns, and the shape of her bonnets, all underwent speculative discussion in the Grange drawing-room.

Grandmamma snorted her disapprobation. She wanted to know why that scribbling-woman had not pitched her tent somewhere else. She had always considered actors, literary characters, and circus people as vagabonds, and was astonished that one of the tribe should have the audacity to intrude into a quiet country neighborhood where she was not wanted. The outcry being thus respectably led, before Miss Wilton had been in the village a week we had denounced her as a firebrand, an incendiary, a person totally wanting in proper feminine reticence; and we laid her under the ban of our little empire at once.

Miss Bootle had the good fortune to meet her on the sands, and pronounced her an interesting person; but on the second morning after her arrival she threw the whole of Crofton into a state of the wildest excitement. There were round matronly faces, acidulated single-blessed faces, and faces still on their promotion, peering over the blinds, all more or less expanded by a grin. The cottagers looked stealthily out past their door-posts; the young gentlemen in Doctor Martin's

surgery chuckled and stared, the very postman checked his trot, and glanced back for a moment with a round-eyed surprise. The cause of this commotion was Miss Wilton, who, quite ignorant of the sensation she was causing, was riding up the town street mounted on a shaggy white pony belonging to the miller. She was unattended, and appeared very much satisfied with her position, which we thought most derogatory. We wondered whither she could be going, and considered that we had gained useful information when we learned that she had taken the bridle-road along the top of the cliffs toward the Nab. She was equipped in a style that shocked our propriety to the utmost verge of endurance. She wore a Holland skirt, a water-proof cape, a scarlet ribbon round her throat, and a broad black felt hat, from which streamed a long feather.

"After that feather," said Miss Tedo Longstaff, one of our Crofton worthies—"after that feather, the woman is capable of any thing!"

The next day Miss Wilton was seen to put out to sea in a small boat with one solitary sailor, still wearing the obnoxious cape and head-gear. On other occasions she was met in remote places with a camp-stool and a sketch-book, "trudging about as independently as if the whole country belonged to her," observed Miss Tedo.

In vain we all marveled at her ignorance of the observances of society, and raved to see her so easy and happy in spite of our bad opinion.

"I shall put an end to this," gasped my grandmother one afternoon, when the stranger outraged all our feelings by walking up the village in the rain without umbrella, her gown being tucked up, and exhibiting a pair of strong laced boots and brown stockings. Miss Bootle also thought Miss Wilton's friends, if she had any, ought to be informed of her proceedings without delay. Accordingly, the next day my grandmother went to call upon her, but, not finding her at home, deposited a card, and promised another visit.

Our judgment was rather shaken on the morrow, however, by the poor lady's appearance at church. She wore a bonnet of the orthodox shape, and a very pretty dress; all which we saw distinctly, because she came in when the first hymn was being sung, and we were standing up. She was young, and rather plain, but quite inoffensive-looking; and I believe most of us were disappointed, having prepared ourselves to see a large, bony, high-featured person, outrageously attired, and flying in the face of all propriety by her general appearance. A council was held as we walked homeward after church, during which Miss Tedo started the idea that this stranger might probably be all the more dangerous, insomuch that she did not wear any insignia of her calling; she must be a wolf in sheep's clothing intent on effecting an entry into the fold, and we must be on our guard against her insidious wiles. Grandmamma demurred to this; she thought Miss Wilton's countenance attractive; and having begun to contradict, from being her most severe depreciator, my kinswoman became her fiercest partisan; and the opinions Mrs. Brande promulgated, Crofton received as articles of faith. On the Monday, Crofton left its card at Miss Wilton's door unanimously, and my grandmother was admitted to an interview, from which she came home converted to admiration of the stranger.

"She is a sensible woman, who is above truckling to the absurd usages of the world," we were informed. "She will be an acquisition to our society; I shall make a party for her and ask her here."

Every invitation to meet the extinct firebrand was eagerly accepted, and when she appeared among us there was almost a strife as to who should be most flattering and cordial, though we did think her plain black net frock and braided hair rather disrespectful, where every body else was in their best attire; but we could allow her a few eccentricities by virtue of her book-writing.

Once introduced, she rose suddenly into fashion, and if she had chosen to scour the country mounted on Doctor Martin's blue cow nobody would have wagged a tongue against it. Her favorite attitude was standing with her back to the fire and her hands behind her, like a gentleman; Miss Bootle said it showed her intellect and strength of mind. She did not talk much, but had a little grave manner which might have passed for simplicity, had not her sleepy eyes brightened up now and then into a wicked and mischievous vivacity. Miss Tedo Longstaff said she believed those eyes saw more than they seemed to see, for they made her skin tingle if they glanced at her when their owner was being discussed, and she would warrant her for detecting people's real characters under the thickest and most specious veils, sooner than any professed craniologist or physiognomist in the three kingdoms.

Soon after her reception among us a book of hers was announced, and every body posted off to the Loughboro Library to get it the first. Miss Tedo Longstaff was the successful person, and after she had run through the first volume, she came over in hot haste to the Grange to *unmask* it, as she stated. She had never liked Miss Wilton, and this was what we got by admitting professional writers within our doors. She bade us observe how markedly Crofton was satirized under the guise of a large provincial town, and then proceeded to distribute the characters among us, as if it were Twelfth Night; they suited us about as well as those charity garments which are all made of one size, and then fitted at random upon divers shapes of bodies. I was not much flattered at the portrait indicated by Miss Tedo as mine: it was a little, impish, deformed child, who made no end of mischief for every body connected with her; neither was my grandmother, who, our enlightener insisted, was caricatured under the figure of a blunt, harsh-voiced market-woman. I dare not say how many people showed themselves aggrieved when

it was pointed out to them that they ought to be so, to whom it would never have occurred but for Miss Tedo's suggestions. She even wanted to mention these cruel personalities to Miss Wilton, but she was prevailed on to forbear, lest that treacherous person should feel flattered and gratified at the success of our portraitures.

After we had wasted a great deal of excellent resentment, and delivered our laboring bosoms of the severity of our indignation to each other in private, we one day made the discovery, by reference to the title-page, that the obnoxious work was passing through a third edition, and that therefore it must have been written and printed long before Miss Wilton invaded our domestic peace.

"Ah, well!" cried Miss Tedo much chagrined; "if she has not taken us off in this book, she will in the next, you may depend upon it. I dare say these are the last people that she lived among, on familiar terms. I won't trust her."

I believe at that juncture, if any body had been public spirited enough to propose such a step, we should have bribed Miss Wilton to go away, and leave us undistinguished by her satirical pen; but we were half afraid of her. It was very distressing, if we tried to take an observation of her in the course of an innocent tea-drinking, to find her eyes either quite dark, or else rolling back a shrewd scrutiny upon ourselves; and if Miss Tedo, as she ventured to do sometimes, complimented her sarcastically on her successful likenesses, to hear her ask, with the most indifferent and unconscious air in the world, "Do they remind you of any of your acquaintance? I am glad if they do, for I always try to be true to nature." As if she understood Miss Tedo to mean a good general likeness to a class, or some individual portraiture at unity with itself throughout.

XVI.

It was now about midway in September, still warm as with the remembrance of summer past when the air was unstirred, but with a chill breath in the breezes that lifted the foliage at unsheltered corners of the shrubbery and garden walks. I was now permitted to walk there daily for an hour, and daily my strength grew, and a faint bloom dawned upon my cheek, until its worn, haggard hollowness rounded to the outline of youth and health. One morning about this time I received a long letter from my mother, which I carried out into the garden to read a second and a third time through. She wanted me at home, and I was desirous to go, but felt, nevertheless, that there was much at Crofton that it would pain me to leave. Grandmamma wished me to stay until the cold season began, and then to return to Eversley for the winter: my aunt Aurelia was coming to visit her mother, and it was advisable that I should make her acquaintance. All the reasons why I should remain at Crofton a while longer seemed to me very good, and those for my return home quite insufficient. Dr. Martin was of opinion that I was just in that state of health to profit by the pure, bracing sea air, and I agreed with him entirely; but through all I had a consciousness that a wholly personal and selfish motive was secretly actuating me; and after a third perusal I put my letter away, and determined to let others decide for me.

It was a quiet morning. The sky was misty blue; gray over the sea, not with defined clouds, but as if a floating, vaporous haze were creeping stealthily up from the horizon to the low-lying shore. The air, balmy and genial, was filled with pleasant and musical sounds—twitterings of birds, the silvery rush of wings from bough to bough, the breaking of the waves upon the sand, the rising murmurs of wind, the fluttering downward of drifts of withered foliage, and the crisp rustle of dead leaves upon the path. My youthful fan-

cy kept me company as I paced to and fro. We weaved fresh tinted buds into our garland of hope, and went on thinking, thinking, thinking, mistily and extravagantly, as the heart of seventeen will think, let grave Experience and sober Reason twit it as they will.

Standing to gaze, through an opening between the trees, at the sea, I said to myself, "If I had been born in these solitudes—if, instead of that glorious old Minster, and that dim west parlor, and the window on the stairs, I had had the sea, and the wild moorland hills up yonder for my study and my dream-land, should I have had my haunting mystical fancies? I should have loved this silence; it breathes vigor and freshness. My mother was moorland-bred. Is it from her I inherit this yearning after nature in her remotest haunts? My heart glows as if a stream akin to it were flowing through its arteries. Its musical pulses thrill harmonious to all these notes of earth, and air, and sea. But the old Gothic city is dearer. I would not change its mute teaching; it is part of me; my familiar—my haunting genius. Its gray shadow lies on me softly; its memories—its traditions are mine, inwrought with the web of my mind."

Returning slowly under the shelter of the trees, I fell into another mood. I was sensible of a mournful strain in my feelings. Whence it came I knew not, nor whither it tended. It had the dim, prophetic outline of distant cloud—cloud which is not storm, but may be. I paused, and, stirring the dead leaves on the pathway with my foot, said, half aloud, "Courage, faint heart! Shall we not take pleasure in the wealth of nature because of these scatterlings of untimely decay? It is idle to lament over one broken branch while whole forests stand in their green beauty, and the blue sky over all. No dews can put life again into these sapless leaves. There they must lie—there they must rot till their dust mix with mother earth, and a fair flower, perhaps, spring from their decay."

My grave thoughts were at this point summarily put to flight by the sudden apparition of Charlie tumbled out of the drawing-room window, followed by the most exquisite little snow-drop of a white kitten that was ever seen. Grandmamma had done it; and her face, looking dreadfully irate, remained at the glass watching the frolics of the pair upon the sunny lawn. In about two minutes Miss Bootle came trembling forth, and tried to coax her pet to take refuge in her apron; but Charlie had acquired a shameful independence of character, and utterly refused to do it. There was dolor in the old lady's every feature as she advanced to me, and said, with a pensive air, "You see how it is, my dear. I did not tell you when you were ill, because I knew you would be hurt and disappointed, as I was; but this is the third time Charley has taken on himself the cares of maternity. I gave half a crown for him as a little king-cat, and it was a shameful imposition. I do hate to be taken in; don't you? Imagine, then, what a shock it was when I discovered him in my wardrobe with two wee, blind, chintzy kittens. Sharpe drowned them, and she did it the second time too, but I contrived to keep that sweet pet secret until this morning, when she found it out, and told Mrs. Brande."

"It was very ill-natured, I'm sure!"

"It was, my dear; but perhaps your grandmamma might have forgotten it if I had not been such a silly old goose. I have been practicing ever so long calling Charlie Dinah, and trying to accustom myself to the use of the feminine pronoun; and when I was reading I am afraid I introduced the name, for Mrs. Brande asked what I meant with 'my Dinahs,' and then, remembering the kitten, she snatched at my apron, and discovered the innocent pet asleep in my lap with its mother. You saw her throw them out of the window: I could have cried. And the worst of all is that Sharpe has been ordered to drown it, and I know she is lying in wait to do it."

"Could we not propitiate her?"

"As well try to propitiate Charlie himself where a mouse is concerned."

"Then let us give it away."

"But it is not weaned; and besides, who would have it?"

"I have a thought! Give it to Mr. Mayne."

"His Hannah would be kind to it: well, my dear, we will walk up to the cottage with it to-morrow morning, and, in the mean time, we must keep it in safe hiding. Poor Charlie will break his heart: it is such a winsome wee thing."

I always had a great delight in circumventing the gorgon Sharpe, so I undertook to hide the little kitten, and after casting about in my own mind for an eligible place of concealment, fixed finally on that grim waiting-woman's best bonnet-box as the least suspicious locality; for it stood in the great wardrobe on the top landing, where grandmamma's state apparel was kept, and which was never opened except on Sundays and festa-days. The bonnet I hid in a trash closet until the following morning, and though both Sharpe and poor Charlie wearied themselves in their researches after the missing kitten, neither succeeded in discovering it.

Immediately after luncheon the next day, Miss Bootle and I received a dispensation to walk up to the curate's cottage; and having made all look straight and unsuspicious, we abstracted the tiny animal from his concealment, and started to carry our present to Mr. Mayne. He was not at home; but his housekeeper, Hannah, received us hospitably, and promised maternal cares to Charlie's offspring. Miss Bootle wept at resigning him, but was comforted at seeing him lap cream, hopelessly entangle Hannah's knitting, and then go to sleep upon it.

"I shall call him 'the Dean,'" said the housekeeper; "my last cat was auld Dean. It is professional, and I do hope to see my master a dean—ay, maybe a bishop, before I die."

We acquiesced in the irreverent title and the reason for its adoption, and then inquired where Mr. Mayne was.

"He has gone across the moor to Loughboro, and I suppose he'll come back by your place; this is a scattered parish for a gentleman who always travels on Shanks' nag. You'll have heard that our rector and his family are coming next week, and then he'll not have so much to do: the old gentleman must take some hand in the parish, surely."

Miss Bootle had heard of the projected arrival of the Pompes; she hoped the curate's work would be lightened thereby, but did not anticipate such a result.

"I thought I knew every face about Crofton, but I don't know yours, miss," said Hannah, with an earnest look at me: "you won't be Mrs. Brande's sick grandchild that I have heard master speak of so oft?"

"Yes I am."

"Why, I thought you were only a lile bairn, and you are almost a lady! If I had thought of you coming, miss, I'd have had all redd up and tidy."

Every thing was in neatest order, and so we said; but the housekeeper continued to express regrets till Miss Bootle turned her thoughts into another channel, and one in which she was particularly fluent—namely, her master.

"He's a grand man!" she averred; "a grand man, with a power of book-learning, and a real kind, Christian heart. If you knew him as well as I do, you'd say nothing is too big or too little for him. I've seen him lift a poor worm off the garden-walk in the dust for fear he'd tread on it when it got too dark to see it as he went up and down. There isn't a thing that doesn't love him, from the childer at the school to the birds he feeds at his window every morning. That little cat you've brought will take to him better nor ever it will to me. It's a way he has; I don't pretend to understand it, but so it is."

"You are proud of him, Hannah," Miss Bootle said.

"Ay, ma'am, and a good right too. I known't his equal. I nursed him in these arms, and a real noble bairn he was, though he had a temper. You may get glints of it at whiles now when any thing puts him up; he's no lamb isn't Master Felix. A strange name, Felix, miss; but his mother said it meant *happy*, and it would maybe be like a blessing to him: I don't know. She was wrapped up in that lad, and he was a good son to her; ay, if he had been as high and mighty as 'Get out!' with me five minutes afore, he'd slip off his shoes to go up to her room, and speak as soft, ay, as soft as a doo!"

"And she is dead?"

"Yes, miss; she died a matter of six years since, soon after Ellen—that was master's sister; there was only two of them. He was a sore care to his mother was Master Felix, though he loved her dearly. He was a troublesome tyke as ever lived in a house. Rest! bless you, he couldn't do it; and ofttimes I'm tempted to think he can't yet, though he's better now nor ever he was. Still, if there is a danger, he must mell' on it and be first in it. You'll mind of that awful wreck last January, Miss Bootle—what call had he to be there? I tell him it will be a strange thing if *he* dies in his bed. He ought to have been a soldier, and then he'd have gotten plague enough without going out of his way to seek it."

Though Hannah spoke in a tone of complaint, it was easy to see that what she imputed to her master as faults were virtues in her eyes. Perhaps there were others there of the same way of thinking.

The first time we saw Mr. Mayne after our visit to his cottage, he acknowledged the gift of the kitten (he said "the Dean") with complacency. Grandmamma being present, asked him if "that silly Bootle" had infected him with her mania for pet cats.

"I do not see why ordinary people should undertake to

despise cats," replied he, with imperturbable gravity; "Montaigne had a cat, and played with it, or it with him. Robinson Crusoe had a cat; Dr. Johnson had a series of cats, and studied their qualities with the discriminating eye of a philosopher. You remember Hodge, madam, alluded to in Mr. Boswell's life of the Doctor?"

"No." Grandmamma could not burden her memory with any such rubbish. Miss Bootle, however, recollected the passage, and was of opinion that it was one of the most amiable traits in the great man's character; she had been touched even to tears when first she met with it.

"Let us have the book if it is entertaining, and read it instead of that dense old ecclesiastical history," said grandmamma.

The proposal was received with favor, and the morning readings became quite attractive to me. I think Mr. Boswell's Life of his friend one of the best biographies that were ever written, and turn to it always with undiminished pleasure and satisfaction.

There we have the very man as he lived, moved, spoke, and thought. I like him better every time I read it. His extreme sufferings and poverty are painful. I like that touch of character recorded of him at college, where he was so ill-shod that he was obliged to keep his room, yet too proud and independent to accept the new shoes which some charitable soul secretly placed outside his door. This was the same pride that later on, when his own unaided energy had earned him success, rejected the tardy patronage of that courtly dissembler, Chesterfield. To think that this man was sometimes in want of a dinner! I wished I could have given him one every day.

And perhaps there are men of powers as great going through the same stern discipline of work and want to-day—who knows? Nobody meeting that gaunt, unattractive figure and gloomy countenance in London streets could say

that he would soon become one of the most noted men of his time. There is a lesson in his life of more worth than all his philosophic teachings. The poor hypochondriac, cursed with hereditary disease, exposed to the contumely of the great and the ridicule of the little, patiently working, fasting, and waiting, upheld by his own strong heart, until his appointed hour comes with its guerdon of honor, success, and fame—not, let us hope, as he says in that bitter letter, "till he was indifferent and could not enjoy it; till he was solitary and could not impart it; till he was known and did not want it."

There is something inexpressibly sad in reading of the sorrows of such a man, though we know that they are ended, for they suggest parallel cases in this present time. Perhaps no man was ever the worse poet for going through harsh experiences: Crabbe might not have written so well but for his hungry probation; and surely Goldsmith could not either. I wonder what Otway thought of life, and poor Chatterton? It was something like gnashing their teeth on stones, I suspect, and instances might be multiplied up to yesterday; but let them pass; this digression is already too long, seeing it has arisen out of the destiny of a kitten.

XVII.

During the last week of September my aunt Aurelia arrived at Crofton, as also did the Rectory family, consisting of Dr. Pompe, the honorable lady, his wife, Milicent, their daughter, and Reginald, their son. From that time forward the peaceful economy of my grandmother's house underwent a thorough reform; the dinner-hour was changed from two to half past six, a constant influx of visitors inundated the little drawing-room, and there was an incessant running to and fro between the Rectory and the Grange, as our house was called. Miss Bootle and I were permitted to exile ourselves to the school-room as much as we chose, and there the lessons went on as usual, Mr. Mayne coming and going at stated hours.

There were three or four families of gentlefolks in Crofton, from among whom it was easy to make up small, early parties, and whenever Mrs. Marston was not at the Rectory, or at one or other of these people's houses, there was always company at home. On these occasions the companion and I appeared in the drawing-room, where I always had a seat near the fire, and away from the drafts of doors. It was understood that I was a girl of delicate health, neglected education, and no character; so people did not supplicate me to take my turn at the piano, neither did they ever make a remark to me that was not as old and as respectable as the hills.

I was ineffably wearied, of course, and deemed these entertainments lesser purgatories, where I expiated my sin of false appearances, being now in perfect health, and, though the theory had failed, much less stupid than my friends and relatives supposed. Sitting in my corner, I watched the incipient flirtations, and heard scraps of the inane talk that went on about me, inwardly envious of the companion who fussed about the rooms and seemed acceptable to every body. It was pleasanter for me when the curate was there, for then I was sure of a few minutes' conversation once or twice during the weary evening; indeed, the mere fact of his presence would have been enough without so much as a word. But when he did not come, it was very tedious: I had only to answer the everlasting question about my health and my morning's walk, to listen to the same songs, and respond gratefully to the same mild advice, tendered by the same amiable old ladies, as I had heard ten times before.

Previous to my aunt Aurelia's arrival I had ventured to indulge in some day-dreams concerning her, which fell collapsed, as day-dreams mostly do, at the touch of reality. She was the faded remains of a once beautiful woman, but the expression of her face was that of utter weariness, almost of discontent. Her manner was at once proud and kind,

careless and capricious; still young, thirty-three at the utmost, she had the worn and jaded look of a woman nearly twice her age; every exertion seemed a fatigue to her, and every pleasure a burden. I had much difficulty in understanding her character at first; afterward it came to my knowledge that she had been early urged into a marriage of interest which had turned out miserably, and being left a childless and wealthy widow at twenty-four, with certain restrictions on her property which prevented her from marrying again, she had indemnified herself for the clog on her liberty by leading since a gay and frivolous life. When I was introduced to her as her niece, she perused my features for an instant, observed that I was not like my father, gave me a limp shake of the hand, accompanied by a cold kiss, and forthwith seemed to forget my existence in the house. I was recalled to her memory, not by my own merits, but in the following manner: coming into the school-room one evening at five o'clock to seek Miss Bootle, who officiated as her maid, she found Mr. Mayne there giving me a lesson.

"I was not aware that you acted as private tutor to my niece, Mr. Mayne," said she; "pray do not let me interrupt;" for he rose to go, we having just come to an end of our day's work. I said so; and as the curate had an engagement, he immediately took leave and went away.

"How long has Kathie had Mr. Mayne for her teacher?" my aunt asked of grandmamma, who entered at the moment.

"I can not exactly say; ever since she was well enough to learn."

"And what do you pay him?" was the next question.

"I am sure Mr. Mayne will never take any money for teaching me," cried I, hastily.

"And, pray, why not, Kathie?" retorted grandmamma.

I felt why, but did not choose to say, and blushed instead.

Aunt Aurelia answered for me.

"Because he works for love," cried she, with a displeas-

ing laugh; then added, as if she had just made an interesting discovery, "Kathie is not so very ugly, mother, after all; her eyes are lovely, and when she colors she is almost pretty, but you dress her like a nun. I shall take her in hand myself, and try to make her rather more presentable."

I felt foolish and confused at having been betrayed into the hasty assertion respecting Mr. Mayne, but I am free to confess that my aunt Aurelia's outspoken criticism did not displease me. So accustomed had I been to consider myself as a very plain girl, and so shyly and painfully conscious had I often felt of my personal deficiencies, that I experienced almost a sensation of gratitude toward her for setting me more at ease with myself. It was enough that I was not so palpably and obtrusively plain as to provoke comment; perfectly insignificant I was content to be, but not displeasing or repulsive.

My aunt's threat that she would take me in hand herself she began to put into execution on the very next morning. She had Sharpe and the village milliner set to work on a new white muslin dress; and she herself, with Miss Bootle for her aider and abettor, made a lay figure of me during two hours for the purpose of distorting my hair into every conceivable hideous fashion. My hair was my one beauty: as soft and glossy as silk, and so long as nearly to reach my knee; nothing would have induced me to part with it, and when Sharpe proposed to have it cut, so that I might wear the fashionable crop of short curls, I flung away from my tormentors, and defied them to touch it. I was not to be shorn of my glory, which—which somebody had admired, for all the waiting-women in Christendom.

"She is as proud of her locks as Absalom," said my aunt, laughing.

"Because she has nothing else to be proud of," was the discomfited Sharpe's vindictive reply.

It would be difficult to say how many times I was given

up to that person's lugubrious attentions and froggy hands before the white dress was accomplished to my aunt's satisfaction; but at last it was finished, and I was attired therein to go to a great party at the Rectory. The much-caviled-at hair was dressed after my ordinary manner—braided from my face, and twisted into a wreath of plaits low in my neck behind: I copied it originally from an old print, but it was so unlike other people's that nobody would acknowledge that it had any other merit than that of being always tidy.

"The dress is very suitable; the child really looks pretty well," was grandmamma's comment, to which Miss Bootle warmly assented.

"Yes," responded my aunt. "Kathie, let me fasten this cluster of rose-buds into the bosom of your dress; they are almost the last in the garden: the crimson and green relieve the whiteness. Now look at yourself in the glass."

She drew me to the long mirror, wherein I saw reflected a slender shape, draped in soft, snowy muslin, which I should not have recognized as my own but for the internal assurance of my personality.

"I should not be ashamed of my niece any where," said my aunt. "I wish she were going to live with me, and I would bring her out properly."

"Aurelia, I am surprised at you!" cried grandmamma, severely; "how can you talk such ineffable trash? It is quite wrong to put ideas into the child's head when in a month or two she must don her plain stuff gown, and work as hard, or harder, than our village schoolmistress. Do you know what depends upon her, that you speak so inconsiderately?"

"Oh yes, mother; and it is a great pity and a great sacrifice, that is all."

"Pshaw! Kathie, do not listen to your aunt's nonsense; she will spoil you. Make up your little mind to a quiet respectable life, and do not care for admiration and frivolity, because they are quite out of your way. Come, Aurelia;

you promised to be at the Rectory early, and it is nearly nine o'clock; make haste!"

XVIII.

My grandmother's allusion to the work-day life that awaited me did not take off the edge from present enjoyment. I was young, happy, and desirous of finding favor in somebody's sight, and this, with the innocent, girlish consciousness that I was looking my best, and rather nice than otherwise, gave a more than usual bloom to my cheek, and to my eyes a not unpleasing lustre. Besides, this was my first party, which is always an exciting era in a girl's life. I had my little vanities then, and do not choose to ignore them now; if I could have decked myself with angel beauty, I would have done it, but only that in one person's sight I might look fair: had all the rest of the world been blind, his approving eyes would have sufficed me. Some people may regard this confession of mine as weak, others may denounce it as unfeminine; I offer no plea in extenuation: thus it was; mine is no model character, but one full of errors and mistakes. As yet I was only earning my experience, and could not be wise before my time. True it is that an instinctive pride kept my childish love hidden; but, secret though it was, it was strong and real—the strongest and most real thing in the whole world to me: I might conceal it from others, but I could no longer deny it to myself.

My aunt and I were among the earliest guests to arrive at the Rectory, and Milicent Pompe led us into a pretty little inner boudoir which opened to the brilliantly lighted conservatory; nobody else was there; so, making my aunt sit down, the young lady knelt on the hearth-rug before her, and, with her round white arms resting in her lap, entered into a low-toned conversation.

"Why do I so rarely see you now, Mrs. Marston?" she said, in a complaining voice: "you have another companion, and don't miss me."

"My dearest Milicent, what would you have? We meet almost daily."

"I want you to go to the Charltons; mamma has accepted their invitation for three days, and I shall expire of weariness if you stay away. That everlasting embroidery and mediæval conversation stifle me; promise me that you will go."

"But I can not leave my mother so soon; besides, you will have plenty of gayeties, and will never feel my absence."

"Gayeties! Perhaps we shall have a carpet dance, when the dust will make us all sneeze penitentially; do you call that gayeties?"

"I am sorry to disappoint you, Milicent; I really can not go."

"You *will* not." She pouted like a thwarted child for a minute or two, then brightening again, asked confidentially, "What do you think of papa's curate, Felix Mayne? I have been longing to know, but it seems as if I never could have you to myself now."

"My dear, I am scarcely acquainted with him; but he is a favorite with my mother, so he must be something superior."

"I like him; he has so much genius, and he is so ambitious and proud. Papa says that he means well, but for any purpose of practical mundane utility he might just as well be revolving in infinite space, a star of the first magnitude."

My tongue burned to protest against this, but I contrived to hold my peace; and presently, on the entrance of a party of people to me unknown, Milicent Pompe and my aunt left the boudoir and mixed with the other visitors.

My ordinary fate then overtook me; and soon I found myself established on a couch between two elderly dowagers, who squabbled over my head about "odd trick," whatever that might be. I resigned myself to a total eclipse with fortitude, and perhaps relief. It was not in me to glide about

the room, making myself universally agreeable, as I saw Milicent Pompe and other girls doing; my strength was to sit still.

Mr. Mayne had been present some time before I descried him in the first room, the centre of a group of ladies, all talking together, while he listened, or seemed to listen, with a grave, sarcastic attention. It has not been said before, and may therefore as well be said now, that this gentleman was universally admired by our sex, who looked up to him almost as a god among men; from the rector's pompous lady to his little pupil in the Grange school-room, there was not one dissenting opinion. By mere force of intellect he influenced most people; he was infinitely greater and better than any body else, so we set him up on a pedestal, as it were, and worshiped; that was my sentiment, at least, and it was not unshared. It often gave me cruel pain to see how women fluttered about him. I fancy it was the same jealousy of passion that quivers in the heart of a poor animal when she is tethered and sees a strange hand fondling her young; she dreads that they may be taken from her. I knew he liked me; I had hived up many tokens of that, but I wanted him to like me *only*. I wanted to be the sole worshiper at the shrine. It pained me now to see him follow Milicent Pompe to the piano, and turn over the leaves of her song. Milicent was a beautiful woman—I could see that—very beautiful; not *lovely*, because of a certain shade of coarseness in expression that time would further develop; but brilliant and striking, with a clear, vivid complexion, great eyes, and floods of deep bronzed red hair. Her figure was tall and large, her neck gracefully and haughtily curved, and her arms pretty, but spoiled by a broad, thick, pulpy hand. Grandmamma said her age was twenty-six; if so, she had preserved unfaded her youthful freshness. She had a fine voice, and sang in a free, natural, careless way, which was exceedingly pleasant to hear. Many people said she was the handsomest and

most accomplished woman they knew. I heard it in grandmamma's drawing-room daily; Aunt Aurelia, whose friend she was, insisted on it with earnestness; Miss Walton added her word of praise—a word of weight at Crofton now.

Before Milicent's song was finished, one of the dowagers had vacated her seat, and left my view more open. I could see all the group at the piano. Mr. Longstaff, from the White House, Miss Theodosia, his maiden sister, Miss Wilton, and old Miss Conolly, stood on the farther side; the three Miss Froudes, in blue crape, with entwined arms, hovered restlessly by; and Mr. Mayne, with young Reginald Pompe, and a black-bearded stranger, hung uncomfortably in the rear; a pale, fair-haired little lady in pink, the dark individual's wife, was close behind Milicent, with her hands clasped on her shoulders. While I observed them they began to sing a duet together, and Mr. Longstaff, smitten with admiration for the tune, perhaps, growled out at intervals a not very tuneful bass. Miss Conolly and his sister seemed to me to incite him to the performance, and afterward to compliment him upon it very unnecessarily.

When elderly people will sing in society, it is always a matter of regret to me that they have ever had voices, they are so reluctant to forget their ancient triumphs; even Miss Conolly quavered through the refrain of that beautiful song, which for thirty years back, at least, she ought not to have attempted.

Mr. Mayne did not appear to be listening; there was a sort of far-away abstraction in his eyes, downcast on the carpet, and a set, cold expression about his lips, which gave a sternness to his countenance. Aunt Aurelia went and spoke to him, and he started like a man breaking away from an unfinished dream. Milicent Pompe laughed, and made some rallying speech, for he appeared to be excusing himself, and then turned again to Mrs. Marston. Though I could not hear a word where I sat, I knew by the movement of his

lips that he was asking after grandmamma, and then he added, "And how is Kathie to day?" for my aunt looked toward the boudoir and said, "She is here; I left her on the couch by the conservatory door:" that I did hear; and immediately Mr. Mayne crossed the drawing-room, and came through the folding-doors straight to where I sat. He seemed very glad, and made a low-toned observation on my propensity for hiding myself in out of the way corners as he took a seat near me. The other velvet dowager presently sailed away; and though we had not much to say to each other, the contented expression that came over his face made me happy for all the night. I liked so much to feel that my being there was pleasant to him, and that he would come to me even when there were so many gayer and cleverer people to talk to. If he had not found me, or if, having found me, he had left me again directly, I should have gone home miserable, and perhaps have cried myself asleep. I always thought his manner to me kinder than to other women: though he was courteous to all, for me his voice had a gentler and yet freer tone, as if he were more at home with me than with them. He once even expressed this when he came from the Rectory to give me my lesson; he said, "Kathie, I feel as if I were coming to my own fireside." And on this evening there was a peculiar kindness in his tone, and an eager softness, very different to the conventional attentions and respect I had seen him distribute among the Misses Froude. I could not help saying to myself, "I am sure he likes me," with a sort of reckless exultation: I did not stop to count the cost of my triumph, then or ever.

Not six sentences had we exchanged when Mr. Longstaff, a long, thin, fossilized gentleman, entered the boudoir, and came forward to talk to Mr. Mayne about some geological discoveries of recent date. Then in glided Miss Conolly, who must have been very old; yet she was still serving the world, and bowing heart and soul to it, though her head was white

and her lank jaw toothless: still making it many offerings of cramps and pains glossed over with, alas! smiles no longer — spasmodic grins, rather; reminding one of the grin mortality wears when the flesh has rotted from the skull, and left it bare, open-mouthed, mocking, as it were, at its very loathsomeness—from which lips wherein life is would shrink away shuddering. It offended my sense of fitness of things to see decrepit age masquerading in the garb of youth, looking as grimly fantastic as a death's head crowned with May roses. She had a harassed expression of eye through all her smirking, which caused me to suspect that, intent as she seemed on Mr. Longstaff's geological conversation, she was aware that her auburn front had been accidentally pushed awry, and that she was watching her opportunity to set it straight. He, poor stony man, seemed quite impervious to her fascinations, looking straight into the opposite wall, and talking like a scientific report. When a pause occurred, she complimented him on his memory, and then, turning to me, asked in a stage whisper if I did not think him a very spiritual person. The queer, shrewd smile that slanted across his hard face boded ill for his susceptibility to elegant figures of speech.

Mr. Longstaff was a frequent visitor at my grandmother's house, and he had distinguished me by a good deal of kindness as toward a child, sending me fruit and flowers often while I was ill, and, since my recovery, even inviting me to the White House to inspect his geological specimens—a mark of favor which his sister told me he had never extended to one of my sex before. He wearied me, certainly, but I generally contrived to keep up my attention, because he was such an excellent and amiable person, and so tolerant of my ignorance, which every body was not. Now, however, he was unpardonably tedious: it seemed as if he would never cease his long-winded dissertation on a fossilized bee's wing, or something of that kind. He fairly talked Miss Conolly

off her feet, and she retired to an ottoman near the doorway, where she could see without hearing. Mr. Mayne supported it a little longer; but, hearing his own name in the other room, he gladly beat a retreat, and Mr. Longstaff dropped into his seat as if he had been waiting for it. I groaned internally, knowing but too well his capability of holding forth on his favorite hobby for hours together; but many bunches of grapes, many posies of Russian violets, with "Mr. Longstaff's compliments, and desires to know how Miss Kathie is to day," weighed me down like lead to my couch-corner. It was never my failing to forget or be ungrateful for kindness, and I thought this gave him a large claim on my endurance, so I listened patiently.

He was not an abrupt person, but it will always be a marvel to me how, in less than five minutes after we were left by ourselves, he, without startling me, glided out of the valley of dry bones into offering me his hand "with his heart in it," and the position of mistress of the White House. His face never changed a muscle—his eyes never swerved from the wall. Miss Conolly, from her post of observation on the ottoman, could not have conjectured how her schemes were being periled; he might have been alluding to some new specimen that he was going to put into a glass case. I had no inclination to laugh, though it was ridiculous; nor to cry, though it was disagreeable; least of all to feel confused; so I declined the honor—indeed, such it was—plainly and positively, in half a dozen words or less, during which and following which there was no physiognomical change whatever in Mr. Longstaff's face, except that his eyes left the wall and sought the carpet. He was silent for the space of perhaps thirty seconds; then he asked in the same tone if he must really abandon hope, and if I was preattached. At this blunt question the color flushed warm in my face; then I turned very white. Probably he felt that he had no right to make this demand almost as soon as it was uttered, for, find-

ing that I made no reply, he added rather hastily, "I crave your pardon, Miss Kathie" (he was an old-fashioned man, and used odd words); "let us remain friends: there is no offense." I was so young as to feel reassured at hearing this, and if he had chosen to take another turn into the world before the flood, I should have followed without diffidence, looking on it in the light of compensation; but he did not: he went to the card-table, and took a hand at whist instead.

My casual views of society, as it existed at Crofton, were not very enlivening, but it must be borne in mind that I was a spectator rather than an actor therein. People appeared to come together in their best clothes, and to conspire to be ceremoniously and respectably dull. Certain elderly ladies and gentlemen sat down to cards; the younger people clustered round the piano, and, if they played or sang, repeated their pieces and ballads as if they were an institution not to be foregone; diffident individuals intrenched themselves behind picture-books, and looked at them perseveringly throughout whole evenings, rarely opening their mouths except to stave off any approach to intimacy. Mr. Mayne, Mr. Longstaff, and young Reginald Pompe were the only unmarried men in the community, while the young ladies were in the majority of six to one; thus a flirtation could only be got up under difficulties, unless some lucky accident drifted an eligible stranger into the village; for Mr. Mayne divided his courtesies impartially, Mr. Longstaff was as hard and unimpressible generally as one of his own pre-Adamite relics, and Reginald Pompe was too deeply in love with his own handsome face and person to be otherwise than conceited and stupid. The Froudes, whose education had been finished in Paris, made a few spasmodic efforts to introduce games and dancing among the evening-party givers, but they had been speedily snubbed into propriety, and ended by becoming as dull, stagnant, and insipid as the oldest and most respectable inhabitants of the township.

The present meeting formed no exception to the rule; there was the usual amount of polite wrangling among the card-playing seniors; Miss Conolly sung her song, "Had I a heart for falsehood framed," and was duly complimented and laughed at; Milicent Pompe gave "Where the bee sucks," and took parts in several duets, with great applause; and a young girl from school thundered through the newly imported "Battle of Prague," which I thought a fine piece then, and do still. Every body appraised every body else's attire; there was the proper amount of talk, never rising above personal or parish gossip; and at half past twelve, every body, as with one consent, rose up to go.

It chanced that in the dispersion of the company Miss Conolly, my aunt Aurelia, and I, were left the last, and Mrs. Pompe arrested us just as we were on the point of departing, to make, as she stated, a communication of importance. To me she hastily presented an album of portraits of celebrated characters, as a hint that little girls were not desired to listen; so I discreetly seated myself at the round table, though not out of ear-shot, for they spoke aloud.

The rector's lady always had a pet grievance on hand for the delectation of her friends; the present one which she wished to impart to Mrs. Marston concerned the curate at Dr. Pompe's living in Hampshire. It appeared that this gentleman was about to commit the indiscretion of marrying, and that, finding his stipend of £30, even with the addition of a furnished cottage, insufficient for the maintenance of himself and wife, he proposed to resign his curacy and turn schoolmaster. Miss Conolly, who had a nephew waiting for a title for holy orders, animadverted on such foolish and monstrous ingratitude; and Mrs. Pompe dismissed the presumptuous curate with valedictory remarks, and an incomprehensible quotation touching the sinfulness of Satan and ambition.

"I should like Mr. Mayne to exchange his curacy here for

Broughton," said she, in continuation; "Broughton is a very populous parish, and he is such a trustworthy person. He would always have suited that place better than Crofton."

"Oh, mamma, we never go down to Broughton now!" interrupted Milicent; "I see no reason whatever for Mr. Mayne's exchanging."

"That partiality of yours is a weakness that I do not approve, my dear; pray conquer it," said her mother, shortly; "it has nothing to do with the present question, and I am surprised that you should intrude it. It is most mortifying to your father and me."

"Very well, mamma, then say no more about it; if Mr. Mayne goes, Crofton society will have lost its best member."

"We are only among intimate friends, Milicent, or I should be ashamed of you. I wonder a girl of your position and talents should be so absurd as to think for a moment of Mr. Mayne, who has nothing besides his curacy; it is most unworthy."

Milicent turned sharply round and walked away; I heard her muttering fiercely to herself as she passed behind me.

"I do not know what the world is coming to," said the rector's lady, as it appeared to me, rather irrelevantly; "nobody is content in their natural station; some are striving to rise, and others hastening to degrade themselves. There is an immense fuss about education; I never could see the use of it myself: it only makes the lower orders impudent and encroaching; as for the daughters of shop-keepers and professional people, there is really no distinguishing them from the old gentry. The Maynes were manufacturers, and Ellen Mayne was one of the loveliest and sweetest mannered girls I ever saw—quite the young gentlewoman. Then look at tailor Craddock's daughter just home from boarding-school; she is beautiful, and sings at church as well as Milicent."

"Better, mamma—twenty thousand times; and tailors' daughters are proverbially handsome," interposed the young lady.

"Let people keep their places. Mr. Mayne has some very radical ideas, and you have imbibed them," retorted Mrs. Pompe; "I heard him telling you yesterday that true education raises men *in* their station, but not *above* it."

"Well, mamma, if our progenitors had all held your theory, we should still reside in caves, promenade the woods sumptuously clad in blue dye, and fare luxuriously every day on acorns."

"Milicent, you are incorrigible!" was the only reply vouchsafed to this; and the elder lady sailed over to where I sat, and asked if the book amused me. It lay open at the medallion portrait of the Duke of Wellington, which was encircled with an allegorical border; while at the bottom, within three inches of the great soldier's nose, couched peacefully the British lion. Mrs. Pompe lifted her glass, and, with a cursory glance at the portrait, observed, "Wellington, I suppose, when he went to see the wild beasts?"

I thought she was jesting; but a look at the set of her full, protruding lip convinced me that she was quite in earnest. No wonder she objected to progress in any shape.

Meanwhile an undertoned colloquy was going on by the fire between my aunt, Milicent, and Miss Conolly, still on the subject of the curate.

"I have thought more than once that he is the least happy and least contented man in the parish," said Miss Pompe.

"That is a strange sentiment, and I hope not a true one," responded Miss Conolly, gravely.

"He is a man of great ability; he is ambitious, he is proud, and he is fettered with poverty: therefore it is very likely to be true," was the reply.

"Milicent, it is most unbecoming in you to speak so much of that person," interrupted Mrs. Pompe, angrily. "I wish he were at Broughton."

The young lady laughed very unpleasantly, and, to my great relief, Aunt Aurelia and Miss Conolly bade good-night,

and we departed. It was very fine, and in overshoes and calashes we walked back to the Grange in company.

"Mark my words!" said Miss Conolly, emphatically; "if Mr. Mayne makes the smallest effort, he may win Milicent Pompe any day."

"Not a doubt of it," answered my aunt, laughing: "she has a nice fortune at her own command, and I think it would be a very sensible thing. There is a great deal of good in Milicent, and he would bring it out. Good-night, Miss Conolly: I hope you will not take cold."

With a somewhat bitter cud of reflection to chew, I entered the house, not quite certain whether the heart I bore in my bosom was not considerably heavier than when I left it less than four hours before.

Grandmamma had not gone to bed, as her custom was, and she asked a great many questions as to how I had enjoyed the evening, who had talked to me, and what I had done; if her manner had been of the caressing order, she would certainly have caressed me then.

I could not imagine what this novel affectionateness portended, for it continued during three whole days; and Miss Bootle, who escaped scolding during the interval, wore an air of inflated mystery infinitely laughable and puzzling. Repeatedly my grandmother led the conversation back to the party at the Rectory, as if expecting some unusual confidence from me. At last, one evening, having called me to her room, where the companion was helping her to dress, she observed, after a little desultory chat, that she thought of inviting Mr. Longstaff to dinner on the following Thursday. I tried to say "Indeed!" in a careless way, but my face burned guiltily. Suddenly my kinswoman turned round upon me with a snap and a scowl, the meaning of which I knew full well. "Kathie Brande, don't think to play the sentimental fool with me!" cried she, stormily: "don't pretend to misunderstand me! Mr. Longstaff spoke to me before he address-

ed himself to you, and I will never believe that you have been such a born idiot as to refuse him."

My aunt Aurelia entered, but, perceiving what was going on, with a glance at me, and a white, scared face, she went out again immediately. That momentary vision gave me strength for what was to come: I recalled similar scenes enacted in that very room years ago, which had grown to miserable and shameful end, and I cared no more for the frantic ravings of my grandmother than I should have done for a dull actress going through a dull part. To all she said, whether passionate rebuke, or scornful taunt, or fierce threat, I opposed only a silent, pale resistance.

"I did not think there was such mulish obstinacy in you, Kathie," she concluded by saying; "but if you are determined to fly in the face of fortune and common sense, I will throw you off. Write to your mother, and say you will be at home this day fortnight."

XIX.

Grandmamma and I kept our own counsel: we neither of us sought sympathy abroad. There is a homely French proverb to which most discreet people give heed: "*Il faut laver son linge sale en famille;*" a process we two went through in that bow-windowed dressing-room many, many times during the ensuing ten days; and then we went out together friendly and smiling, and faced the Crofton world—deceiving it perhaps, perhaps being ourselves alone deceived.

Some of our friends might possibly be going through a similar *rôle* with a like imperturbability. It would be a strange world if all the false seemings were unmasked: a sorry world and a sad if every bleeding heart were to drop its cloak down from the lacerated breast, and lay the anatomy of its suffering bare. I do not think we should get over our griefs any better if we covered ourselves with sackcloth, and put ashes on our heads: people would only hold us up

as monuments of righteous judgment, and point to us as sinners above all who are dwelling in our Jerusalem. And the true mourning, after all, is done in secret heart-chambers, where our dead hopes are sepulchred; where they become first a bitter dust, and finally, by some occult transmuting and refining power, they turn to a rich incense, which embalms our memory through long and arid years. Deeds which our acquaintance designate our follies, may at another tribunal be our virtues—our single redeeming points: who judges rightly, who can rightly judge where so many of our efforts are bent to seem other than we are, and the universal conjuring trick of this world is to throw dust expertly in our neighbors' eyes?

I believe my aunt Aurelia suspected at length what proof armor I wore under my girl's frock, but she never hinted at it. Even women the most worldly respect a pure first love; it is the mercenary, interested *affaires de convenance* they mock at and chatter about so unscrupulously. It is likely enough that they themselves have the true thing hidden sacredly away, like a gem that has come wrongfully into their possession; that they have been into mourning for it; and that, after that period was expired, they learned to look upon the jewel with composure. Finding it quite old-fashioned, chaste, but antique, precious, but useless, some of them will even keep it all their lives as in a relic-box, offering before its shrine annual incense of regrets and tears; others will recklessly barter it away for a gaudy modern trinket, that they can wear on unblushing brow, and which, in time, they may come to vaunt themselves of having gained.

I have seen such bargains made over and over again.

XX.

Two days after the party at the Rectory, Milicent Pompe originated a pic-nic to Bishopswood—a beautiful spot, some eight miles from Crofton. Grandmamma demurred as to

the propriety of allowing me to join in it after my criminal behavior; but Miss Tedo Longstaff having offered to take me in her carriage, I was reluctantly permitted to go.

The morning rose as soft and warm as July, which tempted most of the party to go by water; but grandmamma would not listen to any change of plan for me, and I was shut up in the close chariot with Miss Tedo. Miss Wilton, in her obnoxious cape and feather, rode the miller's pony; Mrs. Pompe, Miss Conolly, and the doctor, went in their family coach, with great provisions for luncheon; and the rest—Mr. Mayne, Milicent, the Froudes, Reginald Pompe, and several gentlemen impressed from Loughboro for the occasion—went in a boat, intending to land on the beach below Bishopton, and walk up to the inn where we were all to meet.

Much rather would I have been of the latter party; for Miss Tedo was very stiff at first, and looked at me with an injured, resentful countenance, which troubled me far more than my grandmother's invectives. At length, unbending with a sort of forgiving severity, she informed me that her brother had gone into Wales. I blushed uneasily; which sign of grace caused her to relent still more, and she added, "You have shown yourself a discreet little girl; but I had rather you could have testified a higher appreciation of my excellent brother, all the same; but we have no quarrel against you. Oh no!"

"I am very sorry to have grieved any body," was all it came into my head to say.

"Don't let such a thought distress you, I beg. John William was unwise ever to think of such a young wife; but when men get to his age, they do unaccountably silly things sometimes. I dare say that in a month's time he will be very thankful that you refused him."

"I shall be very glad, I'm sure."

"Yes, you did not lay yourself out to ensnare him, as some

are doing; but I would wish you to know that you may go farther and fare worse than you would have done as wife to John William Longstaff, of the White House. Yes. He has a fine estate, and a very good head of his own. Yes."

Each phrase was emphasized by a little jerking nod, with the last of which Miss Tedo brought herself up into the corner of the chariot in a very tight and erect position, which expressed her virtuously indignant sentiments admirably. I, meanwhile, experienced all the uncomfortable sensations of a school-girl had up for judicious reproof; and not knowing how to propitiate the affronted old lady, I maintained a submissive silence until she spoke again.

"Miss Kathie," she said, with austere dignity, "you have acted properly, I allow, and nobody would have been more angry if you had taken advantage of John William's infatuation; but I wish he had not given you the opportunity of inflicting the mortification upon him. He bears you no ill will, neither do I; but, at the same time, I wish it had not happened. It disturbs me to have him away; I am quite alone."

"I am going home next week, Miss Longstaff, if my being here makes any difference," I replied, humbly. "I like your brother very much, and am only sorry to have vexed him. It was not my fault; I would have prevented it if I could; but I did not know he cared for me."

And at this point, to my great relief, the carriage stopped before the door of Bishopton inn. Miss Wilton, who had just dismounted, and was kilting up her habit for walking, informed us that the rest of the party had gone forward to the wood, and left word for us to follow. Miss Tedo remarked that it was very unceremonious of them; but Dr. Pompe turning up opportunely to offer his arm, her good humor was restored. They walked on, and Miss Wilton bade me stay with her, insinuating that it would be pleasant to take our time alone.

"Can you laugh?" she demanded, suddenly, as we leisurely followed the doctor and Miss Tedo.

"Yes, under sufficient provocation."

"I am glad to hear it; for I thought when you got out of the carriage that you had been frowned down for the day. Now I am not going to join myself to all those people who have gone on before; they have come for their purposes, and I have come for mine, and mine is sketching. Your company suits me; will you stay with me?"

I acceded, not sure whether I was most flattered by her preference or disappointed at not being with those whom I knew better. There were clearly no social intentions on my companion's part; for as soon as Dr. Pompe and Miss Tedo were out of sight, she sat down by the road side to sketch Bishopton Inn. It was one of those pretty rural hostelries which are fast disappearing from the land; it had a great projecting porch, lattice windows, and a lofty gable surmounted with ball and spike, and half buried in ivy. There was a green in front with a large pond, across which a line of grand old oaks threw a broad mass of shadow. My companion sketched rapidly; but she informed me, for my comfort and sustenance, that in a ride this way the day before she had marked down several picturesque bits of scenery for transference to her drawing-book, so that I need not expect soon to rejoin the rest of our party.

Bishopswood skirted the great Langland estates, formerly ecclesiastical property, and still preserving the remembrance of what they were in the designations of their several parts. Its depths were craggy and precipitous, and gave rise to the Monksburn, which wound its hidden way among stones and underwood until it reached the meadows; whence, almost circling Bishopton, it afterward ran to the sea below, through a stone gully called Prior's Death.

At Bishopton there existed, previous to the Reformation, a richly-endowed monastery, the tenants of which had been

driven out by royal mandate, and their dwelling razed to the ground. Its ruins were still to be traced in the vicinity of the church. From this place, with occasional breaks where it had for convenience been leveled, there extended to a deep hollow in the forest a sort of terrace, once inclosed between two lines of elms, and still called the Abbot's Walk. Cowled figures were said by the superstitious to haunt the Walk, especially on bleak wintry nights, such as that when the king's order came; and a great white stone, over which neither moss nor lichen grew, went by the name of Abbot's Pillow, because tradition related that beside it the body of the venerable superior was found, sheeted with snow, the morning after he was driven from the monastery. Another of the monkish fraternity met his death in the gully through which the beck rushed to the sea, and hence its designation of Prior's Death. This burn ran almost parallel with Abbot's Walk; and several times, as Miss Wilton and I wandered leisurely on, had I to smother my impatience while my enthusiastic companion sat down to sketch.

Sometimes it was the gnarled, twisted trunk of a decayed oak, stretching its arms across the shallow burn, that attracted her attention; then it was a group of cattle standing in the water to drink; and again some curiously tinted cottage, picturesquely ruinous, and long since deserted. She demanded my admiration frequently; but at last she shut up her book, and said, with a curious smile, "Our heart's in the woodlands: well, let us go."

I could not help feeling as if she had discovered my secret, especially when she added, "Kathie Brande, you have the patience of a saint! Let me predict your future for you. Cross my hand, that I may tell you true."

We were down by the burn; so I sprinkled a few drops of water on her palm, and said I hoped it was holy enough still to warn away evil prophecies.

"We shall see: now, like a real gipsy, let me read the

lines of your hand and face, then I will pronounce. You shall hope long and pertinaciously; you shall have much struggle and suffering; final calm, and great happiness; and a heart and strength for all."

"Thanks; you are quite oracular; I dare not seek to know more. The prediction would suit Sibyl Froude as well, or Milicent Pompe either."

"No, it would not. It suits you, and nobody else."

"But every body has sun and storm, happiness and sorrow."

"Stuff, my dear child; there are natures so dull, selfish, and insensible, that, providing they eat and sleep, nothing moves them. Their passions are like stagnant water, their vices and virtues all negatives. They are born, and they die—that is the sum of them. Their happiness never rises above a lethargic content, and their unhappiness never exceeds a vague sense of disturbance in their torpor. Let them be: we have nothing to do with them. I like the fine clay through which the vivid soul shines like a star, not the dense earthen pipkins that the rushlight can not penetrate. You and I think and feel more in one month than the rudely fashioned vessels do in a whole lifetime."

"Oh no, you are mistaken in me; I am very ignorant and slow. I know nothing. Every body says so," I interrupted hastily.

"Every body is an earthen pipkin," was the reply. "Does your priest, Felix Mayne, say so? He knows better. You have a fine intelligence, cultivated by thought, solitude, and observation—the truest intelligence. You have not read many books, you have not gone through the whole manual of modern accomplishments successfully (no, indeed, thought I), and you have not lived long enough to know society; but you have a sense to see, and see justly; to understand, and that quickly. I approved you from that moment when you came up to me at your grandmother's house and offered me flowers, with a little shy look that said, as

plainly as words could have done, 'Don't class me with all these people who have laughed at you.'"

I reddened, and confessed that some such thought had been in my mind.

"Yes. What you feel you show: your face is a sad tell-tale. I watched you at the Rectory the other night, when you were in the boudoir. For a long while your countenance was still, and simply observant; but when its play began there was a shrewd turn, both of eye and lip, which marked your ready appreciation of all that was notable among the guests. For a time you were passive, as if waiting for something; then anxious and meditative; and finally your eyes kindled with a very glad light: if I were a man, and loved you, I should like your eyes to brighten so for me. You seemed very well contented all the evening after, though any body might have thought you were having a very dull time of it."

"I am rarely dull," said I, shrinking a little from my companion's inquisitorial probe.

"Because you extract food for fancy from every thing and every person that comes in your way. You do not talk: many people think there is nothing in you all the time that you are unconsciously reading off their little shams, peculiarities, and general traits of character, and storing them up in your mind for afterthought. If you were a writer, you would reproduce them mellowed and toned down, with all the coarseness refined out of them; for you have an instinctive shrinking from whatever is base, that leads you to idealize human nature, and think of it better than it deserves; and what you can not but condemn, you strive to cover with the wide mantle of your charity. You are not suspicious, and you are tenaciously hopeful. Then you have veneration strong, which gives you faith in goodness, and a great admiration for all that is lofty and noble. But there is a measure of weakness in you too; you are never certain of yourself;

you will act impulsively, and then fret yourself for days with the idea that perhaps the impulse was wrong and the deed faulty. If you see that any one looks down on you, you don't resent it, but feel oppressed with your insignificance, and endeavor to rise in their esteem; but I imagine that to be incidental to your training. Were you thrown on your own resources, you would fight your battle independently."

"Is it pleasant to write books?" I asked, thinking that myself had been quite sufficiently discussed.

"Very pleasant. It is happiness enough for me now; I do not much care for its annoyances. Sibyl Froude said to me a few days since, with her ineffably-patronizing air, 'I presume *you* feel yourself above domestic matters and lady's work, which we like so much?' It is a fact that I can handle a needle as deftly as any woman: I do not relish being looked upon as incapable, and deficient in common sense, which I am not. The same young lady also confided to me that hitherto she had looked upon female writers as disreputable and dangerous characters; indeed, I see that many of the respectable people do regard the gift as a mental twist and deformity—a visitation like blindness, a wen, or any other physical defect—something that they may treat with a sort of lofty, half-contemptuous pity. Sibyl thanked Heaven piously that she was not a clever woman, because men hate clever women; upon which Milicent Pompe, who was present, handed to me a literary curiosity, which she laughingly stated to be her friend's highest mental effort. It began:

"'DEAR MILICENT,—Will you look in the top right-hand drawer of the wardrobe of the room where I slept when I was at your house in London, and you will find a small box which I left behind. Unlock it with the key I inclose, and in the second compartment (the knob is off the lid, and you will have to raise it with your penknife) you will find some

pearl buttons. Please take one of the plain ones and get it matched with a dozen of the same kind: I want them for a lovely new habit-shirt. My bonnet came safely: it is sweetly pretty. How is dear little Tiny?' &c., &c.

"Milicent assured me that she considered this specimen a favorable one, for it was neither scandalous, ill-natured, nor ill-spelt, and asked if I did not think it an excellent diploma of the young lady's domestic virtues. I need not inquire if you have friends among these girls, for I am sure you can not have; they despise us both, from the depths of their little minds—you as insignificant, me as unfeminine."

"You don't care, then, not to be loved?"

"I can exist without it. I don't like personal abuse: I shrink from it naturally, as I do from all things harsh and disagreeable; but, the momentary soreness past, I feel quite indifferent. Not long since, Miss Tedo Longstaff, a well-intentioned but very impertinent old lady, lectured me on the satirical passages in my books, until I was obliged to remind her that we are bee-like in our propensities, and cull our store from every pasture; but, instead of visiting only sweet flowers, we extract a pungent kind of honey from nettles and brambles, and that some tastes relish the wild honey more than the dulcet sirup. Then she wanted to know if ever I took people off, and I had much difficulty in convincing her that accidental resemblances must occur in books that are true to nature, but that I had never in my life sat down deliberately to take a portrait, though I must have reproduced the results of my observations in society over and over again. She thought it very wrong, and advised me to write essays and moral lectures."

"They would be safe, at least; but in so-called personalities, people are not half so ready to take a laughable resemblance to themselves as they are to fit it to their friends and acquaintance. They are quick enough to cry, 'How like

so and so!' but I never heard any body say, 'How very like me!'"

Miss Wilton laughed. "Nor I," said she; "and if you give any book the reputation of being personal, how eager every body suddenly becomes to read it."

I blushed, remembering how we had all rushed to Loughboro Library after Miss Tedo's report on Miss Wilton's own books; and she gave me a quick, convicting glance, which told that she knew of our avidity and aggravation quite as well as I did.

"Tell me what character was given unto you, Kathie Brande?" she asked. I informed her. "And were you vexed? You must have seen the absurdity of the charge."

"So I did; but I did not like having such a disagreeable reputation fixed on me. I fancied there must have been some resemblance, or Miss Tedo would not have said so."

"My dear child, she would have said so under any circumstance, for she pounced on the book with no other intent than to share out its characters among the good folks of Crofton. I was infinitely amused when the Loughboro man told me into what a state of excitement the whole of the innocent community had been thrown by that old story, written three years before I ever saw any of them. But here we are in the wood; do you know which way we must take?"

I did not know, but thought the hollow to which Abbot's Walk led the most likely place; so we still kept to the now less distinctly marked terrace, and by-and-by the sound of voices warned us that we were approaching our party.

"We shall only come in for the crumbs of the feast," observed Miss Wilton. "Are you indifferent to the good things of this world? I confess that I am not."

And, indeed, when we entered the hollow, we found that only Sibyl Froude, looking very sour, Dr. Pompe, Mr. Mayne, and Miss Tedo, were there; all the rest were sauntering gradually away by twos and threes to explore the bonnie wild

forest glades. I proposed that we should possess ourselves of some fragments, and do likewise; but my companion needed comfortable refreshment, and drew near to Sibyl, who sat mournfully among the relics of the luncheon, eating biscuits.

"What is the matter?" Miss Wilton kindly asked. Sibyl pointed to a white net bonnet lying much crushed on the grass beside her. "Reginald Pompe sat down upon it," she tearfully explained.

"A new bonnet is very near to a pretty woman's heart; but don't grieve, Sibyl," said Miss Wilton; "if you could weep a flood, its shape would never be restored. Never let that squashed bit of finery spoil your pleasure. I can see it in your eye at this minute, it has taken all the flavor out of the veal-pie, turned the Champagne into bitters, and the macaroons into saw-dust; worse, it is taking away all the zest of the many compliments you have received to-day: cheer up!"

Sibyl smiled dolefully, and twirled the wreck round on her finger, asking, with a touching pathos, if we had ever seen such a thing in our lives before, and if it were possible for her to put it on to go home in.

"Certainly; let me straighten it for you," replied Miss Wilton, and she really did contrive to elicit some shape out of it again. "There! but for a perverse little twist in the crown, it would be all right;" and she replaced it on Sibyl's head with the assurance that, except for the cloud in her own eyes, she looked as well as she did when she left home. "Well, then, I'll walk with you; and Miss Tedo shall take me home in her chariot, and Kathie Brande can go in the boat; will you?"

"Yes, I should like the exchange."

While Miss Wilton and I were preparing to fortify ourselves with luncheon, Reginald Pompe came back to fetch Sibyl, and Mr. Mayne to attend upon us.

"Where have you been wandering?" he asked. Miss Wil-

ton passed him her sketch-book; but just as he was going to sit down with us and look it over, Doctor Pompe arrived to ask whether he would go up to those springs at Woodhead that they had been talking about, and he went away with the rector at once.

"Ah!" thought I, sighing, "I shall not see him any more now, and I counted on such a happy day!"

"Never mind, Kathie, you are going home in the boat," said Miss Wilton, answering my thought in an uncanny way, that made me reflect whether it would not be as well to wear a mask when in her company.

She rallied me good-naturedly on my lack of appetite; and when she had lunched herself, proposed that we should resume our stroll and artistic researches. We did so, and wandered deep into the wood, but we encountered none of the party, and supposed they had gone in other directions. Miss Wilton was bent on finding the place where the Monksburn rose, and dragged me on through craggy, difficult places, and soft, spongy ground, until I was ready to drop with fatigue. At last we came to a ledge of gray rock, down the face of which trickled little lines of moisture; below a tuft of alders, a gush of ice-cold water poured like a miniature fall, and, wearing itself a bed among the stones, babbled the secret of its way through the wood to all listeners. This was Monksburn; and Miss Wilton said she must sketch the romantic vignette it would make. I was patient enough now, knowing that my day was gone. We staid there so long, and loitered so much by the way in returning, that when we passed through the hollow not a vestige of our party was to be seen: servants, hampers—every thing had disappeared; neither did we overtake any of them in going along Abbot's Walk to Bishopton.

Miss Wilton knew a short cut to the beach where the boat was left in the morning; so, instead of going to the village, we descended thither; but, to our dismay, we were told that it

had gone "most of an hour ago." We posted up to the inn in haste—the carriages had gone too.

"Never mind, Kathie, millers' horses always carry double: you shall ride home behind me," said Miss Wilton, cheerfully.

Indeed, there was nothing else for it. Oh, how grandmamma would scold! The woman at the inn lent me a skirt and a warm cape, and a sort of pad being put on the pony, there was I mounted behind Miss Wilton. The effect must have been ludicrous in the extreme, for, as we started at a slow pace, a broad grin on every face bade us good-by.

"Keep up your spirits, Kathie; it will be dusk when we make our triumphal entry into Crofton," said my companion. "This is not a very elegant mode of conveyance, but in an emergency it is not to be despised. I wish I could make a sketch of our appearance."

I can not say that I appreciated the comicality of it so much as Miss Wilton did, for I was excessively tired, not a little disappointed, and by no means cheered with the prospect of grandmamma's displeasure.

The September day was already closing when we left Bishopton, and as we could only go at a foot-pace, the dusk overtook us several miles from Crofton. It was a beautiful clear twilight, and the sun set beyond Marton Nab in a crimson flush of glory.

A silent fit had come upon Miss Wilton; at last she said, "This time of day always inclines me to blinking retrospections. It is of no use to turn up the sods that cover the graves of past pleasures and past pains; but once our youth past, all women who are alone do it. You live in the future, I in the past; there is nothing for me to look forward to except growing old. But how wrong of me to talk dismally to a young thing like you, dwelling in golden dream-land still!"

She relapsed into silence for some time, and then, to my surprise, began to whistle very deftly the air of "Auld Lang Syne."

This was a novel accomplishment; and the tune ended, she said, "I had two brothers and no sister; we lived alone with my father; our mother was dead; they taught me boyish sports, and I caught up their trick of whistling. I shall never leave it off now: it reminds me of them. They are both dead." And she glided into the lively tune of "Molly Bawn." It ceased suddenly, and she exclaimed, "Here comes somebody to meet us!" It was Mr. Mayne.

"Well, did every body think we were lost?" cried Miss Wilton, as he came up.

"There was a misunderstanding. Sibyl Froude told us she was going in one of the carriages, but she never recollected to mention Kathie; therefore we did not wait. You must be weary, child," he said to me.

"Not so very tired." Indeed, the sensation of heaviness left me directly I heard his voice.

"We conjectured how you would get home, but your grandmamma was so restless and uneasy that I said I would come and look for you. Have you had a pleasant day?"

"Yes."

He walked alongside of us all the way until we came to the Grange, and then went in with me, which diverted my grandmother's wrath for the time into the direction of Sibyl Froude; but, for a punishment, she pretended to think I appeared so worn out as to need sending to bed immediately; and, as Mr. Mayne staid to tea, it was a punishment, and a grievous one too.

XXI.

Toward the end of the week the weather changed abruptly. For three days there was a storm; the sea one heave of foam and wrath, the sky one mass of lurid cloud. During that period Mr. Mayne did not come to the Grange, and I missed my lesson in consequence. I tried to think it was business that had kept him away, but I knew he had been

at the Rectory twice. On the third evening we were all at home, and, as it chanced, quite alone. I had taken a book and sat by the fire, not reading, however, but listening to the angry sounds that convulsed the air—the cracking thunder, the ponderous roll of the wind, the breaking of the waves upon the shore, the tossing and rustling of the garden trees, and the peevish rattle of doors and windows.

More than once, through the tempestuous wrack, I had heard a long, dull sound: it was repeated very distinctly a third and fourth time, while we were all silent. I asked what it was, and we listened intently for some minutes; then the low boom of a gun was heard above the whistling winds and the roaring waves.

"A vessel on the reef!" cried my aunt Aurelia; and we all rushed to the window. A fierce spasm of pain clutched my heart as vividly uprose from my imagination a vision of death in the midst of that wild uproar. There was a heaving blackness outside, riven at intervals by spears of lightning and clouds of driving rain, and through it all, like the groan of a soul in agony, came the echo of the signal-gun.

We had stood perhaps five minutes hearkening in silence, when a quick, light step came across the lawn, and a flash of lightning revealed the figure of Milicent Pompe. We went out into the hall to meet her. She was very pale, and her hair, all loose and wet, hung about her throat, while she trembled excessively, whether with cold or excitement it was impossible to tell. Grandmamma brought her into the drawing-room, and asked what had possessed her to leave the house on such a night. She made no answer, but stood on the hearth, wringing the moisture from her hair, and looking bewildered. Aunt Aurelia offered to give her some wine, but she put it back with her hand impatiently, and said, "You have heard the gun from the brig on the reef—you hear it now! Mr. Mayne has been dining with us, and he has gone down to the shore; the men are afraid to go out

to the crew's rescue, and he will go. Why should he risk his life? They must know the danger better than he does. It is rash folly." She spoke in a hard, unnatural tone, as if laboring under violent and repressed feeling. I had drawn close to her side, laying my hand on her arm, and was listening breathlessly. She looked suddenly into my face, and said, sharply, "You are not afraid of wind and rain, are you?"

"No."

"Then come with me. We may dissuade him from putting his life into such useless peril."

"Nay, I should bid him go rather than hold back," was my reply. I do not think, however, that she heard it; for though grandmamma, Aunt Aurelia, and Miss Bootle all lifted up an alarmed remonstrance, she pulled me into the hall, wrapped a plaid with her own trembling hands over my head and throat, and with a painful grip on my arm hurried me out into the night.

"Listen!" cried she, as we ran along under the creaking trees to the gate which led from the shrubbery into the lane —"listen! there is the gun again, so no boat has reached the brig; perhaps none has started, and we may be in time."

We crossed the road, and stumbled down the sand-hills toward a spot where we dimly discerned a group of seamen, who, from the loudness and violence of their voices, appeared to be quarreling.

We stopped. "Some of them are gone," said Milicent; "he is not there."

We listened, and gathered from the next few words that, incited by Mr. Mayne, some of the boldest seamen had put off with him to the wreck.

"I was sure of it," gasped my companion, and her clutch on my arm tightened until I could scarcely forbear crying out with the pain. She drew me a few paces farther off, and sat down on the sand as if incapable of supporting herself longer; she trembled convulsively, and I could feel her

quick, panting sobs as she leaned against me. At length her grasp on my arm relaxed, and I rose up, watchful and patient.

Strange! I had no fear for the issue, and was calmer and more myself than I had been when standing by the window in the warm, well-lighted room. It was almost like gazing into a wall of darkness, except when the lightning revealed the foam churned in white ridges along the shore, and the dense masses of cloud that whirled across the sky. Once or twice beyond the black swell I saw a spark shining through the spray, which I supposed to be a light hung out by the brig for the guidance of the boat, and also the dark hull of the vessel lying motionless where it had struck, its mast broken, and the sea washing over it.

Milicent had not stirred from her crouching posture when suddenly a shout ran through the night. "Saved! saved!" was the cry. She then started to her feet, and rushed toward the group of seamen, who were drawing in a strong cable. I followed, trusting that in the confusion we should escape observation, for now several women had come down to the shore, and were adding at least their voices to the efforts of the men. Soon the boat with its human freight grated on the sand; a tall, bareheaded figure leaped into the surf, and waded to the shore, carrying in his arms a slight boy, who, from his nerveless attitude, appeared to be either dead or insensible.

A flash from a lantern struck across this man's face as he resigned his burden into the hands of the women, and revealed to us the features of Mr. Mayne. He was ghastly white, and his black hair hanging wet over his brow made him scarcely recognizable. His lips were close set, and he did not speak a syllable as he returned through the surf to the boat. Several persons had been set on shore; how many I saw not, being intent on the proceedings of those still in the boat: it was pushed off again, and disappeared in the mist

and darkness. There were still five individuals on the wreck, some one cried. The next quarter of an hour was one of voiceless agony. Milicent hung like a dead weight on my arm; the fury of the storm seemed to be redoubled. It was all we could do to maintain our footing against the wind. We had approached the water, and the foam curled over our feet, while we were drenched with the flying spray and the rain; ever and anon the lightning gleamed athwart the sky, and showed us the anxious, waiting group on shore, and the dark, heaving sea beyond.

Now the boat was returning; yet a few minutes, and it would be safe. A wild cheer arose, as if to give encouragement to men whose strength might yet fail them. It was repeated—twice—thrice. Then for a moment a dead silence, as if even the storm hearkened; and a long, triumphant yell went down the wind, as the boat, broken by the fury of the waves, sank within ten yards of the shore. Milicent cowered down with her face hidden against me. I watched—silent, strung up, calm. Out of that peril *he* would come unscathed, I knew. And so it was. There was the shrill cry of one "strong swimmer in his agony;" but Mr. Mayne and the rest battled their way to the shore, sorely beaten and exhausted, but still living men.

"He is safe," I whispered in my companion's ear. She lifted her head, looked wildly toward the spot where he stood for a moment, and then, in spite of resistance on my part, began dragging me in the direction of the sand-hills.

"What did we come out for, if this is all we can do?" I could not help asking; "could we not be of use to some of those poor creatures?"

"They will be taken care of—they always are," was Milicent's reply; then, as I still held back, she added, passionately, "Do come on! Do you want to be laughed at? Oh, you are lead or ice, surely."

It seemed then as if we had been guilty of a very foolish

and undignified escapade; and as I had as little wish to be ridiculous as she had, I no longer resisted. She ran stumbling along in the loose sandy road, never relaxing her grasp on my arm, while the rain, driving in our faces, half blinded us. On coming to the garden gate she stopped.

"I am not going in," said she; "I must make haste home: they fancy I went to my room ill. Promise me one thing—that you will not tell where we have been to-night. Promise!" I did promise. "I can trust Mrs. Marston," added she; and then, with a short, hot grip of my hand, she left me, and hastened on toward the Rectory.

My grandmother and Aunt Aurelia received me at the door, with Sharpe looming severely in the background; and I was hustled up stairs, where Miss Bootle was preparing possets, without being permitted to say a single word. The waiting-woman applied herself to the task of removing my wet garments, and remarked, parenthetically, that I must sorely have needed a task to set out on such a wild-goose chase that fleysome night. My aunt was anxious to get her out of the room, and when we were by ourselves she questioned me eagerly about Milicent.

I told about the wreck, and the loss of the boat, but evaded speaking of my companion, as well from delicacy toward her as from an indefinite pain it gave myself.

"Kathie is wiser than Milicent," said my grandmother; "if the foolish girl can not keep her own counsel, the fewer confidantes of her absurdity the better."

XXII.

I was left to toss and tumble through a weary, restless night. If I slept for a few moments, miserable dreams harassed me. Either Milicent was dragging from my shoulders a tattered cloak which sheltered my limbs from the bitter frost, or she was wresting out of my arms a perishing child; then mocking at me, down on my knees, lonely, helpless, and

despairing. Again I was on the sea-shore, watching with straining eyes a diminishing speck on the water, which seemed to take away with it my very life of life. Then I was in the Minster, kneeling beside a grave; grass grew out between the stones of the pavement, and looked like death and desolation.

I awoke in the morning with a dull sense of pain and prostration somewhere, but where I could not tell; it was mental rather than physical, I suspect. Striving to put it away from me, I arose. The wind had fallen, and both sea and sky were wrapped in a blank of lead-hued mist.

"It is the weather; it always influences me," I said to myself, and began to dress.

Sharpe came in: she observed something unusual possibly, for she remarked, "You must just get into your bed again if you don't want to have a fever, Miss Kathie. This comes of being wet to the skin."

I accepted her explanation and obeyed, glad to cover my face from the light and to be still. By-and-by grandmamma and Aunt Aurelia came softly in, but I feigned sleep, not wishing to be questioned; so they went out again, and left me alone.

My mind was in great disorder: a blind, helpless fear seemed to be maundering to and fro in it; shapeless, yet all pervading; intangible as night darkness, but as black.

Toward noon my aunt entered. "Kathie, are you awake?" she asked. I uncovered my face and looked up. "You are not ill—only tired, I hope. If you don't feel better before evening, we must send for Dr. Martin."

She took my hand, which was burning with fever, in her cool, pleasant grasp. I saw she had not said all she came to say. "Mr. Mayne has been here making most particular inquiries about you, Kathie," she went on. "I fancy he more than half suspects where you were last night; so, when you see him again, you must be careful not to betray it, for

Milicent Pompe's sake. She is very foolish to expose herself as she does. She has been here too, and she was very anxious to come up, but my mother would not have you disturbed."

"I will not be made her confidante, Aunt Aurelia. Keep her away from me!" I hastily exclaimed. My aunt made no reply beyond slightly elevating her eyebrows; and then advising me to try to sleep, she went away. In the afternoon up she came again, and grandmamma too.

"Well, Kathie, how do you feel now?" asked the latter. "Mr. Mayne had to come into the village again, so he called and left these for you."

They were a few late roses, very beautiful and very fragrant, but where she placed them on the coverlet I let them lie, untouched.

"Poor child, she is quite heavy and dull," said my aunt, kindly. "Have you any pain, Kathie?"

"No."

"Then will you get up by-and-by? Milicent is coming in to spend the evening, and perhaps we may have Mr. Mayne too. It would be more cheerful on the couch down stairs than here alone."

I entreated to be left in peace for that day, promising to be quite well on the morrow; so they let me have my own way.

All the evening, while Milicent Pompe was singing in the drawing-room, the roses lay withering. I never once put forth my hand to take them, though my eyes scarcely wandered from their rich crimson, until in the evening dusk they were undistinguishable from the surrounding white. Miss Bootle, coming in with my tea, espied them; and saying it was a pity the poor things should die for want of a drop of water, put them in a glass on the toilet-table. By morning they had revived, and some of the buds were half blown.

During the silent, dark hours I had time to gather my

strength about me, and to take myself severely to task. My curbless fancy had well-nigh borne me into unfathomable abysses of shame and wretchedness. I had been willfully deceiving myself, and deserved the rude shock which had forced me upon the truth.

Who and what was I, that I should look to be loved? Milicent was a beautiful and passionate woman, and where she gave her love, equal return would surely flow back to her: it could not be otherwise. Let me remember this. I fell asleep with that thought weighing on me like a nightmare, but awoke at dawn quieted, and without the lassitude and depression that had made all so hopeless the day before. I rose immediately, dressed, and wrote a long letter to my mother, in which I dwelt much on my return home. As I sealed it, almost unconsciously the words escaped my lips, "I wish I had never seen Crofton."

Then I set my window open, that I might feel the sharp morning air upon my face; it came blowing over the roses, gently rifling them of their purfume, which it wafted toward me like a plea for kindly thoughts of the donor. With the first sound of movement in the house I descended to the garden with a plaid over my head. There was hoar-frost on the ground and on the trees, on which the lingering green of summer was changing to crimson, brown, and golden yellow. The storm had beaten off the leaves in the shrubbery, where they lay in sodden masses on the paths, drifted in heaps against the beech-tree boles, and whirled over the dead wild flowers, which they half buried.

The beauty of autumn was ever to me a melancholy beauty. Nature draws up her veil of cloud and frost over her head, and sits low on the earth, mourning with wild storm-winds like dying groans and sobs; weeping floods of dreary tears, while decay sweeps round her pleasant haunts, and makes them dank, bare, and cold as empty sepulchres.

Pacing slowly and thoughtfully in the gray, chill morning,

I seemed to see stretched out before me the vista of a long life: laborious, blank, with little cheer, and but dim, lowly hopes. Already it appeared that my rede was being spun for me, and that I had but to look on and submit. My childish impatience and willfulness being gone, into their place had come, in lieu of higher trust, a certain passive humility; half fatalist, perhaps. I said to myself, "*Che sarà, sarà*," and ceased struggling with the blind time that had overtaken me.

At breakfast I observed that Aunt Aurelia kept her eyes studiously averted from my face; and when it was over, grandmamma advised me to take a long walk on the sands, to blow away the remains of my feverishness. Really glad to be alone, I left the house, but not in the direction indicated. I wanted to be up once more on those purple-black moors, high, high above the salt mist and the monotonous wave-song; so I turned into the fields, and tramped along their upland paths, and through the grass, lush with heavy rains, until I emerged on the heath, which lay wild and wide below a sky of silvery gray, flecked over with small, snowy clouds. On the horizon still hung huge watery masses which the storm had not yet swept away, and seaward was a dim haze enveloping all as in a cloak. I had crossed this moor in the coach on coming to Crofton—what a gap lay between that time and the present!—it stretched for miles away, an even surface of now fading heather, a desolate expanse suggestive of wintry winds and drifting snows. A cross-road, very rugged and stony, seemed to strike into the heart of the moor-land, and taking it in preference to the highway, I followed it for a couple of miles, until it divided into two branches, one tending eastward to the sea, the other going in a northerly direction.

A great block of stone, perhaps intended to serve as a guide to travelers, furnished me with a resting-place, and I sat down to think in the deep solitude. I was far above the

valley here, in one of nature's grand, indefinite calms; the air was, for the present, almost as still as in a pictured landscape, and there was a pale, clear shining out of the sky which made no shadows, but only a gentle suffusion of warm light through the atmosphere. There was the subdued murmur of the ocean-life far off; the distant shout of the wagoner to his team, and the whistle of people laboring in the fields; and nearer, the insect-voices in and out among the heather.

Mine was then that mood which is infinitely soothed by the balm of peace and natural beauty, not that wounded spirit which turns away, sick alike of earth and heaven. Affection had warmed my heart, but passion had not scorched it, nor disappointment frozen. There was cloud in my sky, but no storm of death-dealing potency; under that cloud I might walk subdued for a little while, but it would disperse. I was glad that I was going home. There would be peace and safety, and household affections warm and true, between which and me no interloper could come. For Milicent—rich, beautiful, brilliant—were the first-fruits of the love that had given me, a weak, pale girl, a shelter under its summer boughs, and some fragrant blossoms swept down by gentle sighing winds.

"Let me be content," I said; "the timely shelter has refreshed me. It may be remembered with pleasantness; never with regret, never with pain."

XXIII.

For two hours or more I staid up there communing with my own thoughts, and rose at length to return home, patient and almost cheerful. I took the steep descent to the east instead of the way I had come, because it seemed shorter, and there was a darkening in the atmosphere as if the storm was brewing up again. From the edge of the moor came sailing heavily those great packed clouds, driven on-

ward and onward by others behind them, and followed by a strong cold wind.

Half an hour's brisk walking brought me to a green lane, shut in between two high hedges: warning drops had then begun to fall, and soon the storm broke—pitiless, drenching. Uncertain of my whereabouts, I tramped steadily forward, hopeful of meeting with some friendly roof before I was half drowned. But the lane was long, straight, and unsatisfactory; it seemed, indeed, to lead nowhere; and the propriety of retracing my steps before I got further entangled had just begun to suggest itself, when I espied a light curl of smoke above the hedge, and, a few paces farther on, a little wicket-gate. It was Mr. Mayne's cottage.

I had been there once before, but, having come by a different route, the locality looked quite strange to me: it was, indeed, the last place in the world to which I should have voluntarily gone for shelter; but Hannah, who was standing in the porch, apparently on the look-out for some one, descried me in an instant, and called to me to go in. I hesitated, and made as if I would proceed; but she came hastily down the streaming path, and said that she could not answer to her master for letting me pass by in such a storm. "So come your ways in, miss; the rain will be over in an hour," persisted she.

I suffered myself to be persuaded, and was led into the curate's parlor—a queer, bow-windowed room, full of little nooks and corners, and littered with books. A cheerful fire burnt in the grate, before which reposed the Dean, now a fine, well-grown cat, and high in the window hung a pretty brass-wire cage, in which a bullfinch was caroling melodiously. The housekeeper hung my shawl to dry, and then began to speak of the storm of the night before last.

"Little thought I where he was in it all," said she, "but I might have guessed: it's so like him to be periling his life whenever he gets a chance. He's gone now to bury that

poor lad that was drowned off the wreck. He belonged to Marton." She gave me some details respecting the drowned sailor and his family, which showed that she took an interest in the people to whom she belonged deeper than is often the case with persons of her class. She was indeed a faithful, unselfish, kind creature.

Observing that I watched the bird in the window, she asked if I had one; and when I answered that I had not, she told me I should have the pretty little songster in the cage.

"But perhaps, Hannah," said I, "your master may not like you to give it away."

She stopped me quickly. "Oh, miss, I hear him talk: bless you, *I* know," said she. "He has brought it up for *somebody*, and that somebody's you. Why, if you was Ellen herself, I don't think he could like you better than he does."

Hannah's shrewd gray eyes were on me as she spoke, and I colored deeply with strange, mixed feelings. "Take off your bonnet, miss, till the rain gives over, or you'll get heated, and may be catch cold when you go out," she advised.

I did so; upon which she took my face between her hands, kissed me, said I was "real bonnie," and she "didn't wonder." I laughed confusedly, and replied that I wished every body would look at me through her partial spectacles. This metaphorical expression led her to descant upon the virtues of good eyesight, which she declared to have been hereditary in her family for many generations: witness her mother and grandmother, who both read their Bibles without glasses up to their deaths at seventy-nine and eighty-two. By this time the rain had partially ceased, and I rose to go; but Hannah put me back into my chair with a little gentle force, that might have been greater had I resisted.

"If it's master you're afraid of, he won't be in till dusk, I expect, for after the burying he'll go to Marton," said she, with a smile that would have been quizzical if it had not been so kind.

Though not afraid of Mr. Mayne, I did certainly not desire to meet him that day. I think, if it had fallen to me to decide, I should have chosen to go home to Eversley without meeting him again; and when I had got there, I should have bitterly regretted it—as we so often have to regret proud, willful deeds when they are done, and hasty words when they have gone from us beyond recall. My confusion, therefore, was extreme when from my seat by the fire I heard the gate clash, and Hannah cried, "Master's changed his mind: he's come back."

She bustled out into the entrance to receive him, while I hastily flung on my shawl, re-tied my bonnet, and prepared for instant departure, wishing myself at home, on the moor, on the reef—any where but where I was. Still this was very foolish; I knew it was, but yet could not prevent my color from changing absurdly when Mr. Mayne entered, dripping at every point, and, shaking hands, told me that I was weather-bound for yet an hour to come, and must have some luncheon before I thought of stirring. He was so matter-of-fact, cordial, and frank, that it was far easier for me to accept in the same spirit than to invent any sufficient excuse to go away, for the rain was again pouring in torrents. I was left alone for about a quarter of an hour; for Hannah, who seemed to be a privileged domestic tyrant, told her master to change his things if he did not want to catch his death. While he was absent I took a book and tried to read, but only one idea would present itself: how happy I was to be in the sunshine of my master's presence! how completely the sore, fretting pain at my heart was forgotten when I heard his voice! When he came in again, he stirred up the fire, took his easy-chair, and told Hannah to bring in luncheon, which she presently did.

"By-the-by, Kathie, you were down on the sea-shore the night before last," he suddenly said. It was fortunate he did not look at me, for the blood flushed scarlet in my face,

and so startled was I that no answer came. "I suppose you are an admirer of nature in all her moods: her fierce one is certainly not the least sublime. Perhaps you had never witnessed such a scene before?" I had not. "I was not surprised to see you there; for when Kathie Brande takes it into her head, she both says and does strange things. But your companion—what brought her out? I acquit her of all enthusiasm for the charms of nature and danger."

"Whim, perhaps; I can not say."

Mr. Mayne smiled: it was a peculiar smile; doubtful, sarcastic, not pleasant. "Being there, what was it that caused you both to run off in such haste? Was it the wind, the rain, or that your curiosity was satisfied? Or was it that you feared to be seen?"

I blushed an affirmative.

"There it is! I have observed often that it is our best actions which seem to lie most open to ridicule and misconstruction: what a paradoxical state of things it is! Kathie, were you ashamed of being seen to take an interest in your fellow-creatures? If you were, it was a weakness alien to your real character."

I attempted no self-exculpation, lest I should say too much; and, diverging from the personal strain into which the conversation was tending, Mr. Mayne told me that the vessel which had been wrecked was from Leith, bound to London, and that the young man who had been drowned was a sailor who had voyaged over every sea in the globe—in frozen polar regions, in breezeless Indian seas; and yet, after a life of peril, it was his fate to perish within sight of home. Hannah uttered an ejaculation of pity, and her master said she must go and visit the drowned man's mother, who was sorely smitten by his loss.

"It is not good to speculate on the ways of Providence," he added, after a pause, "but it is difficult, at times, to see why events fall out as they do. I had a friend once—Ar-

thur Crawfurd—he was my school-fellow and college companion; a fine, soldierly, enthusiastic fellow; full of energy and fire, capable of self-sacrifice, prompt, intelligent, armed for every emergency: so good a tool might have done a long day's work; yet he was drowned going out to join the African mission. I have never replaced him: he was the best friend I ever had."

"Master," interrupted Hannah, "where's that ribbon I bound round your sprained wrist this morning?"

"The ribbon? Oh! I took it off up stairs and have forgotten it, so better proof can not be that it is not needed: my arm is only stiff."

"You're very willful, master."

"Those books, Kathie, are not of my gathering," the curate said, pointing to the largest of the book-cases; "they were Arthur Crawfurd's: he left them to me when he decided on his vocation. I think he had brought together every poet of eminence since the flood. Do you like poetry?"

"Yes."

"What kind?"

"Best that which echoes my own feelings, or speaks of silent struggle patiently endured. There is a great deal of what is called poetry which to me is full of sound and fury, signifying absolutely nothing. What is purely speculative and obscure I do not like; what appeals to my intellect only I do not like. Poetry, as I understand it, is a voice speaking to the secrets of the heart. Perhaps I am the best pleased when I meet with some blind, wayward fancy of my own, which could never have shaped itself out of my mental chaos, fitted with apt words: they move as light over the formless darkness."

"I take that to be the popular feeling as regards poetry. Touch a passion, a sentiment—strike some nerve of past pleasure or past pain—and the heart-echo answers back with a thrill that stamps that verse as poetry to one section of hu-

manity at least. For myself, I still like a measure that stirs my pulses like the sound of a trumpet; as in music I prefer a march to soft strains, and the clash of a military band, or the roll of your Minster organ, to the sweet flute or even the best-trained human voice."

"Poetry, then, is individual, not universal?"

"It seems so: at least, taste is individual, and will never be reduced to one standard of perfection. To some it is given to see more than others, as they are endowed with intellect, refined by cultivation, sharpened by experience, or purified by suffering. I have never thought deeply on the subject, however, so I merely offer these remarks as suggestions, not as opinions: you must sift them for yourself, Kathie."

"And, master, you know I always like what tells about them that go down to the sea in ships," interposed Hannah, gravely. "There's St. Paul's shipwreck in the Acts, and some pieces of Job that speak of what I have been seeing all my life, and I understand and like them best of any story chapters that I read."

"And when you go about your work, I hear snatches of sea-songs—"

"Ay, master, I remember them since I was a bairn at home: perhaps I caught them up from my father—I don't rightly recollect; but they are my favorites."

"And they are poetical by association, chiefly if not wholly, for they are of the rudest ballad style."

"Nay, master, there's sound in them, and sense too, I'm sure."

"I do not gainsay it, Hannah: surely there is. When I say 'poetical by association,' I mean by the feelings they touch and rouse—by the old scenes and memories they call up. I will give you an illustration, Kathie. A week or two since, at an evening party, I met an Indian officer—a stalwart graybeard, whom you would have supposed about as susceptible to tender emotion as a rhinoceros. There was a

and visions did you witness that night! I was at home, where every body loved me; where labor would be pleasure, being turned into stepping-stones to a higher, warmer love. Since I had left that dim, quiet room—not quieter or dimmer in its perpetual shadows than I had been—what vital change was there wrought in me! All my young anxieties, all my rebellings against Fortune, who had given me a lot among the workers of humanity—my vague aspirations to be something greater and better than I was—were put to rest. Often had I stood in that narrow window, when the dawn of summer morning was gilding the Minster towers, and thought in my faithlessness, "There can no light come down to me; I shall always stand in the shade: there will be no vividness in my existence; it will be all twilight." Yet already through the mist had broken the midday sun; under its influence were budding better feelings: I felt rich in happiness, for my heart dilated from its immaturity and coldness into full strength. Kneeling at the window, whence I could catch a glimpse of heaven, I realized the change most distinctly. This place had heard my childish sobs of pain—my later visions murmured to myself; on this deep ledge had I often sat, with knees for desk, and pencil in hand, scribbling down the puerile fancies of my girlhood—fancies that I was ashamed for any one to know, and which were hid away in a little cupboard in the wainscot with a shabby doll and a few battered toys, that some lingering fondness induced me to preserve from the destructive fingers of the little ones.

Often during the night I awoke, and rose up to look out at the Minster to assure myself that I was not in a dream; and in the morning when, before any of the others, I was down in the west parlor, I amazed Ann by crying aloud, "It is true, then; I am really at home." Yes; there were the poplars overtopping the garden wall, there was the dingy slip of ground with its smoky shrubs, the mossy terrace steps,

and the range of unhappy flower-pots. My bird came chirping to the side of its cage for its accustomed caress, and we had a little foolish talk together about somebody who had been kind to both of us, which mystified Ann to that extent that she observed to my mother, "Miss Kathie was well-nigh daft with joy at getting back home again."

XXIX.

That day brought a considerable burden of serious talk with it. In the first place my aunt Aurelia had charged me with a proposal to my mother for the adoption of Isabel. The child's eyes sparkled with irrepressible glee when she heard it; she sprang up, and danced round the room, singing a wild street-ballad, and clapping her hands delightedly. My mother looked at her sadly and gravely, and bade me write a decided negative.

"I can not consent to give up any more of my children: your sufferings have been a warning to me," she said, resolutely.

Isabel stood for a minute quite disconcerted, then she gave way to one of her most outrageous bursts of passion, stamping, crying, dashing herself on the floor like an insane thing. Any word of reason only seemed to increase her fury: she vowed that she hated us all, and she hated her home, and she wished she were dead. My mother grew white, but made no sign of retracting her determination; instead, she bade me write the letter, and get it done with; upon which Isabel dashed away up stairs to the garret, and fastened herself in. To her violent mood succeeded several days of resentful sullenness: she would speak to nobody, not even to Jean, who exerted all her little arts of soothing and affection. My mother said she must be let alone; the fit would wear off; to notice it only strengthened her obstinate anger. It passed, at length, in a burst of tearful repentance, and the subject of contention seemed to have been finally laid aside and forgotten.

My mother was at this time very full of anxiety about Stephen. The examinations for the scholarship had been going forward, but the decision was still pending. She thought Stephen's success certain, and was reposing in this belief so implicitly, that I had not the heart to disturb it by suggestions to the contrary; indeed, I ended by being as certain as she was. When I spoke to Stephen himself about it, and asked him how he felt, he replied impatiently, "Oh! confound the scholarship, I'm sick of hearing about it. You know, Kathie, I'm safe to win, for there is only Francis Maynard to care about, and he is but a slow, plodding fellow: I'm not afraid of *him*."

And my brother's confidence in himself engendered a like confidence in me. This scholarship was fifty pounds a year for three years; and no wonder my mother looked to it as a material help during Stephen's time at college.

Our third subject of grave discussion was my employment at home. It had been several times talked about at Crofton, and my grandmother had suggested that I should take a few little girls of the better class to instruct in the elementary branches of education, with Isabel and Jean. For any thing else I was unfitted, and not quite free from nervousness, even as regarded the teaching of young children: I knew so little myself. My mother approved the plan, and encouraged me by citing the many people in the Minster Close who, having known and respected my father, would be glad to extend a helping hand to his children. It was finally arranged that after Christmas I should begin; and in the interim I was so fortunate as to obtain the promise of seven little girls, all under ten years of age. This success set me free from all present anxieties; for, to keep my school select, the parents agreed among themselves that I should be more liberally paid than was usual; and no doubt, as I obtained experience, I should increase my number. It must be confessed, I thought my prospects very favorable.

When I communicated the tidings in a letter to Mr. Mayne, he expressed himself disappointed. "I had hoped nobody would have you but myself," he wrote.

XXX.

One evening, about a fortnight after my return, when Stephen was away at the Minster, and the little ones were in bed, there came to our door a knock—a loud, authoritative knock. Expectant of good news as we daily were, every unusual sound brought the scholarship to mind.

A heavy foot mounted the stairs, preceded by Ann's quick, running step. "Please, ma'am, a gentleman wants to speak to you," was the ex-Graycoat-girl's style of announcement; and in walked a tall gray-headed man, with a lank, stooping figure—Mr. Withers, of the Grammar School.

He entered, swinging his long arms, and swaying his person backward and forward in a series of embarrassed bows, rubbing up his grizzled hair, coughing, and indulging in various other nervous eccentricities. His countenance forbade us to hope that he was the messenger of pleasant tidings: naturally he was a pale man, but now he looked flushed and annoyed. Three several chairs did he try before he settled; and then all the information he appeared to have to communicate was that we should be surprised to see him: a fact of such vast importance that he stated it four times, and then changed his seat again. My mother had put on her quietest and most resolute face; she looked neither agitated nor impatient; I was on thorns.

Mr. Withers next told us it was a fine day (we could hear the rain pattering on the glass); then that it was of no use to beat about the bush; and, finally, it was what he always feared.

Still the story did not come; so I spoke. "Stephen has not won the scholarship, Mr. Withers?" I said, interrogatively.

"You are right, my dear young lady, he has not; and it is his own fault entirely," replied the master, speaking like a sane person, and looking immensely relieved. "There is not another lad in the school with his abilities; but he is too indolent and pleasure-loving by half. It is the old fable of the hare and the tortoise, Mrs. Brande."

My mother suppressed a sigh, and said something about its being a pity and a disappointment. "Not that his failure in this instance need change his ultimate destination," she added, calmly; "I have provided against such a contingency. Perhaps it may have the effect of sobering him for the future."

"There is no harm in the lad," said Mr. Withers, cheerfully; "I have a feeling for him for my friend Brande's sake; he has decidedly more than common ability, but he is rather too self-confident. I agree with you in thinking this may give him a check. He is a fine youth; and I assure you, ma'am, I feel more than a common interest in him. Good-evening, Miss Brande; I wish you a very good evening, ma'am."

He shook hands with my mother, and bowed himself out with almost as many graces as he had bowed himself in. After he was gone my mother quietly resumed her work. I could not; I felt ready to cry for poor Stephen's mortification and disappointment.

"Do not be distressed, Kathie," said my mother, but with a tremble in her own voice notwithstanding; "Stephen takes nothing in earnest; I should not be surprised if he made a jest of this. Listen; he is coming in now: is not that his foot?"

And so indeed it was, taking half a dozen of the shallow steps at a time, as if all life were a mere feather-weight; he was whistling, too, as blithely as ever, and his countenance looked as free from trouble as it always did. We received him very quietly; pity and condolence were quite uncalled for.

"Well, mother, you have had Mr. Withers about the scholarship?" said he, carelessly; "Maynard won. The decision was announced this afternoon."

"So we understand, Stephen. It is a disappointment, my boy, to all of us, I am sure."

"Yes, mother, but I suspect there has been favoritism in the case; Maynard is old Withers's nephew, you know."

My mother did not agree to this supposition, much as it might have flattered Stephen and comforted herself.

"Well, I am glad it is over and off our minds; mine feels all the lighter for it," he added, with a toss of his beautiful head as he sauntered toward the door.

I followed him out at a sign he made, for I saw he wanted to say something more.

"Kathie, mother does not seem to mind; I was afraid she would be in a terrible taking," he whispered.

"It is not her way to say much, Stephen, but she is grievously sorry," was my answer.

"I have been an idle dog, and given her lots of trouble," said he, in a sober tone; "but I'll mend, Kathie—see if I don't. After to-night I'll give up the Minster bells and the river, and study like a regular sap: I'll be as hard-working as Maynard, and then I shall soon distance him out and out."

I had not much faith in poor Stephen's good resolutions: he procrastinated always, and his to-morrows of amendment never came. He had little practical energy: his character possessed neither bone nor muscle, but was always soft, plastic, and yielding. It never seemed to me as if he were making one conscientious effort to overcome his natural indolence. He loved society, and he loved pleasure, and was possessed of most of those dangerous qualities that make men acceptable in the one, and slaves to the other; in short, he was gifted with all those endowments which usually distinguish the class of people of whom friends say in their adversity, "They were nobody's enemies but their own"—a false

conclusion very, very often, since few are so isolated as to stand alone in their ruin.

The immediate consequence of the disappointment about the scholarship was the reversal of my mother's determination respecting Isabel. The child had been promised lessons in music, for which she showed a remarkable talent, conditionally on Stephen's gaining it: my mother was now obliged to explain to her that the expense would be inconvenient, and this brought on another of those frantic outbreaks of temper which were the dread of the whole house.

During the sullen period that followed my aunt Aurelia arrived in Eversley, and staid at "The George," on her way to London. We saw her several times, and Isabel made all her grievances loudly known. My aunt sympathized with her, and strenuously combated all my mother's arguments and denials. The result was a reluctant consent to the child's leaving us, which quite intoxicated her with delight; and, remembering how eager I myself had been for change, I scarcely wondered at it. From the time it was decided that she should go, my mother could scarcely bear to let any one touch her but herself. I recollect on the last night she kept her close at her side, and when she was put to bed she curled her hair, and loitered tenderly over every stage of her undressing: more than once her lips were pressed to the little white shoulders and dimpled arms, while Isabel looked wonderingly at her, as if with a dim perception of being pained by so much love. My mother's presentiments for her child were not happy ones, but she held her peace.

My aunt remained in Eversley a week, during which interval she often had Isabel with her. The innocent young creature did not intend to be selfish or unfeeling, but many times during those few days I saw my mother's eyes filled with tears as Isabel ran out into the court in thoughtless haste, crying that the parlor was dull, and she wished her aunt were ready to go away.

I shall never get out of my mind's eye the look of the pretty thing the morning she left us. She was in all haste to be gone; and her little impetuous ways, as she danced about and brought the color into her cheeks, made her look bright as a vision. She shed no tears at saying "Good-by," and her face, at the last moment, beamed upon us from the carriage-window in its merriest guise.

Thus this bird took flight from the parent nest with eager, untried wing! What storms were to beat those slender pinions? what cruel winds to beset the wanderer? My mother prayed that night that the Father of the fatherless would temper them to the nestling's weakness.

XXXI.

The house seemed very still after Isabel was gone. My mother missed her blithe carol, and Jean was dull for want of her playmate; but, after a few weeks, things fell into their new routine, and her empty place seemed no longer strange. We heard from her of her safe arrival in London, of our aunt's pretty house, and of the teachers who were to transform her into a clever little lady. She seemed perfectly happy in the change, and I think my mother's anxieties lessened. Aunt Aurelia, we were persuaded, would be very kind to her, as it was her nature to be kind to every thing; and the child's own self-will would protect her from the heavy restraints which had formerly been so injurious to me.

Christmas-time was now approaching. The ground was hard as iron with a long frost; the river was frozen, and the Barbican moss was covered with skaters. Jean and I had walked to a country friend's for some holly to deck the west parlor, and were returning through the South-gate, laden with spoils, when Mr. Withers overtook us. He wanted to speak to me about his three little motherless girls—could they be received at my school? Polly was twelve, and the others younger. I was delighted, and said I should be most

glad to have them. The arrangement was made in five minutes, for the master was not a man of many words. Jean whispered this was good Christmas news for my mother, and could not refrain from capering as we went up the steep stone steps to the walls, preferring to return home that way rather than to carry our bunches of holly through the town.

There was a pale, winterly sun shining on the roofs of the houses and on the Minster, and a clear, frosty, healthful breath in the air, that pinched our cheeks till they were rosy red. I felt so happy and free from anxiety that I might have imitated little Jean's fashion of testifying her joy if I had not been so burdened. As it was, I only hummed the burden of a Christmas carol, which faintly echoed the music in my heart.

We did not walk fast, so that by the time we came to the steps where the ferry-boat was usually moored to convey passengers across the river, the sunshine had given place to dusk. The river was now passable on foot, so we made our way, among skaters and sliders, to the farther side. Stephen and several of his schoolfellows were there, young Maynard among the rest. He came up and spoke to Jean, offering to carry her holly, but she rejected the proposal quite tartly, and quickened her pace to escape up the street.

"If he had not beaten Stephen, Bella would be with us now," said she, in pettish explanation. "I don't like Francis Maynard half as much as I did, Kathie."

We can rarely afford to be just where we love.

When we reached home my mother was called upon to rejoice with us over the three pupils that were added to my list, and this she did by saying she was always sure her little Kathie would make herself friends. Jean and I then threw off our bonnets and cloaks, and, having summoned Ann to bring the steps, proceeded to decorate the room. We made festoons to garland my father's book-case, filled

the chimney-glasses with sprays begemmed with scarlet berries, and, the bare flowers being removed from the stand, wreathed it over with green. Then I mounted the steps to garnish the old mirror between the windows, and as much as possible to hide its unsightly frame. I was singing now with all my heart, and Jean's sweet little voice chimed in. My mother sat by the fire-place, where a great Yule log was blazing, admiring our handiwork, and occasionally putting in a word of advice.

Though Ann had not brought in candles, the room was full of warmth and cheerful light. The black old wainscot, with its quaint carvings, shone again, and the crimson furniture looked homely and appropriate. I remember thinking it quite picturesque and pretty in its Yule-tide garnishing. There I was, mounted aloft, holding in my hand a splendid branch, which I wished to fix in the arched top of the glass, my hair all in wild disorder, and my cheeks crimson with the air and exertion of our walk, when the door opened, and some one came in. Thinking it was Stephen, I cried out to him to come and help me; but, Jean's song ceasing suddenly, I turned round, and saw, to my delight, a tall, cloaked figure standing just within the room. It was Mr. Mayne.

I sprang down with an exclamation of pleasure, and, in the inexpressible joy of the moment, he caught me in his arms and kissed me. This was quite presentation enough to my mother. She came forward, and gave him a warm reception, and Jean shyly accepted his overtures of friendship. She confided to me afterward that he was so tall, and so serious in the face, that she was half afraid of him, and wondered a little how I dared to love him.

That evening we all spent together in the old parlor. My happiness was full when I saw how completely my mother and Felix agreed, and how sincere and deep were the respect and admiration each conceived for the other's character. But I had never doubted that it would be so.

XXXII.

There come now a few white days in my memory: nothing intermeddled with their joy. The morrow of Mr. Mayne's arrival was Christmas eve. We passed the morning in the Minster. A bitterly cold morning it was, with a frosty sunlight shining through the windows, and throwing jeweled arabesques of color on the pillars and pavement. Each trivial incident of this time has burnt itself deep into my memory, and I love to recall the picture in its vivid minuteness. Outside in the Close all was white, hard, and clear. No wind stirred; but the black, bare poplars swayed slowly to and fro, and through the towers went a low, plaintive sigh, as if some breeze had lost its way among the bells, and were moaning to get out.

The great south door stood wide, and a few strangers came strolling in, and went roaming to and fro the aisles with stealthy steps, prying behind old monuments, and peering through iron gates, to the small satisfaction of their curiosity. Presently Mr. Withers advanced down the nave, with lurching gait, and umbrella in hand, with which, notwithstanding the place and his profession, he was playing an imaginary but very energetic game of cricket. Then the Dean entered, in white surplice, carrying his cap in his hands behind him. His fine countenance was overcast, as with the shadow of recent trouble, but he mechanically bent his grand white head in return to the reverent salutes of the people. Next came the scurry of a troop of little boys, who had been improving the time with marbles on the Minster steps to the last moment. They all had short white gowns, crimped frills, and shiny faces, and were endowed with that superabundance of spirits which seems to be a providential dispensation to keep chorister boys warm. Then followed the bustling rush of three minor canons, all late, all corpulent, and all short of breath. They disappeared through a little low door for

a few seconds, whence they issued forth fully robed, with glowing countenances and great decorum. A man, bearing a silver poker, marshaled them to their respective places, and the service commenced.

The congregation scarcely numbered two score souls. The strangers settled down for a few restless minutes, and went out again into the side aisle to read the Latin inscriptions on the tablets until the music began, when they returned, or hung about the doors of the choir to listen. The prayers were almost inaudible.

In about an hour the service was concluded, and away flashed the chorister boys, pulling their white gowns over their heads, slyly hitting each other, and jumping on the pavement to warm their frozen feet, while the Dean, the minor canons, and the canon major departed in a group, and left the old Minster for a few hours to the sunshine, the vergers, and the strangers.

While Felix and I were hesitating whether we should go or stay, a verger came up to us, recognized the cloth by a deferential bow, and asked if we wished to see over the building, to which we assented. With a few other individuals we followed in procession, listening to stories and descriptions run one into another like badly-struck colors; went down into crypts—dark, damp, mouldy; glanced over monuments of kings, archbishops, bishops, and other great men of the earth; heard of Oliver Cromwell's melting down silver images, and leaving the niches empty; saw the pious relics and ancient curiosities in a little dark room like a vault; visited the beautiful Chapter-house, and so round about and back again until we came to the place whence we had started.

Our guide then suggested that it was a clear day to go to the top of the great tower. All the other people declined with a shiver; but Felix and I accepted the proposition, and, being led to a narrow door, were ushered into twilight at the foot of a spiral stair; then up—up more than three hund-

red steps, for the most part in gloom, sometimes in total darkness. At the narrow loop-holes we paused to take breath an instant, then forward again, till at length we emerged on the sloping, battlemented roof.

Here we were alone; the hum of men—every sound—lost. We might have been in a city of the dead for any voice that came up to our ears. The air was very keen, and even the sunshine had an icy gleam on the white stone, all unlike the glow of summer. For miles and miles away the fields lay gray and bare, the woods showed black in their nakedness, and the river—white as a silver ribbon rolled loosely over the landscape—was lost in mist toward the sea. Northward and westward stretched lines of low hills, covered with unmelted snows, where the snows would lie until the spring dawned on their chill slopes.

We staid and talked together a little while—talked of our future. Who does not? For whom is the present so all-sufficing as that imagination can not woo them to dwell on the mysterious unknown and unseen? Then down again into the chastened light of the long aisles, with quiet, hopeful thoughts for guides.

In the afternoon we were at the Minster again, to hear the Christmas eve anthem. We sat up near the altar, where the music came rolling like billows of sound through the hollow roof. Looking upward, we could see nothing but darkness—pillars, arches, gemmed and storied windows, all melted into the solemn gloom. The singers' voices came as from a long way off—sweet, rejoicing, triumphant, like those voices of the heavenly host which, centuries ago, were heard by the shepherds of Bethlehem on the midnight hills of Judea.

That evening, when we were all of us together in the west parlor, Felix brought out a map of India, upon which the missionary stations were marked down. Stephen and he pored over it together for some time, the rest of us watching.

"It is a fine field for our labor," said Felix, gravely.

"Yes," returned my brother, "for men like you, who are at heart as much soldier as priest, and who would die in the cause with pride and pleasure."

"Kathie, would you go?" asked Felix.

My glance at my mother, and Jean, and Stephen said, "And leave all these!"

Forthwith the map was folded up and restored to its case. "I shall find my work at home," replied he, contentedly.

There was a great fall of snow that night, and when the clanging bells awoke us to the Christmas morning, it was to look out on white streets, and snowy billows drifted up against the Minster buttresses, and lying thick on every ledge, and moulding, and grotesque carving. The sky above was pale blue, and the sun shone frostily over the winter mantle in the Close. We all went to St. Mark's church, and showed Felix my father's grave under the low wall. It struck me as less dreary and neglected with its pure covering than it had ever done before; and perhaps the same thought came into my mother's mind, for she turned round and said to me, "Kathie, when I die, remember, I wish to be buried by your father."

The time of Mr. Mayne's stay with us was marked by no events. It formed one of those pleasant homely pictures which memory loves to hang in her gallery, and often to loiter before in after days; a fireside study, full of tender touches and delicate shades; trivial, perhaps, and ineffective to others, but to the owner precious in its quaint simplicity, and most dear in its quiet truth. I showed him all the old town; made him penetrate with me into the ancient courts of Friar-gate and the Barbican, where we disinterred many architectural remains, unobserved till then amid the squalor and poverty that herded among them. I led him round as much of the walls as remained, and showed him our walks, that he might know my favorite haunts as well as I knew his at Crofton.

On the morning before he left us we went down to the river side; it was a cold thaw, very chill and very dreary, but it did not affect us. The sky was heavy and low; and the river, being very full, flowed with an eddying current, whirling on its surface bits of stick and straw. The fields were dead green; the sedges on the banks all torn and brown; the gaunt, naked boughs of the trees like black pencil lines on a dull gray ground. We had come out there to be alone—that we might have the cheerless scene to ourselves; but its misty desolation was cheered and brightened to us by a ray from the City of Hope. I understood that day how necessary I was to Felix's happiness, and also how my love for him lay deep down among the springs of life.

But it is enough of the old happy days. He left us; Stephen went back to school, and my work-a-day life began.

XXXIII.

The west parlor was now a different and a busy scene. There were little figures perched primly on green-baize-covered benches, samplers in hand, shaping uncouth letters on the canvas; also stammerings through Mrs. Barbauld's stories and Dr. Watts's hymns, and dear, quiet Jean setting every body a good example. My beginning was very unambitious, but people spoke to me kindly and encouragingly, and said I must hope better things by-and-by, being still little more than a child myself. In the course of a few weeks I fell into the routine of my new duties as if I had been at them for years. I had met with a great many stumbling-stones on the path of knowledge myself, so I did my best to lift them out of my young scholars' way. It is painful to hear a child fret over its difficulties, therefore I did the hard bits in seams, and the obstinate sums that would not come right; and if—as sometimes would occur to Polly Withers, and Janey Munro—the little people flew into a passion, and stamped or danced on their books or work, I let them achieve

their riot and subside into shame-faced silence. Altogether the results were not discouraging. By four o'clock in the afternoon the scholars had all trotted home; then I either had an hour's private study in my old retreat, the stained window, or else took a walk into the country with Jean. Sometimes we went to the Minster; almost always we did on Wednesdays, when Dr. Munro, the head organist, played, and the anthems were the finest.

Stephen was rarely in except at meals; his good resolutions had departed to that limbo which good resolutions are said to pave. He still frequented the bell tower, went boating on the river, and played at cricket, while I accomplished his impositions. I wished sometimes Mr. Withers could know who did them, then perhaps they might have been rather less frequent. The lad had a blithe, frank humor, which made him very popular among his companions; he was mischievous, but not malicious, and his selfishness was so gay and unconscious that it was impossible to hate it—almost to discourage it.

Post time at our house was nine o'clock. Felix Mayne's letters always came on Thursday mornings. For nearly a year there was no more conspicuous event in my life than the receipt of these letters. They were always dearly welcome; for, though I was contented and happy as girl could be, they came like a breath of vivifying air through the tranquil summer noon, whispering of a golden autumn yet to come, rich laden with such pleasant tones. No shadow had fallen yet across the rippling river, and the wayfarer still breasted her way with head erect and pulses throbbing, full of life and hope.

XXXIV.

On the eighth of October in this year my brother Stephen went up to Oxford. He left by the night coach, and I went to the office to see him off. In his haste—for we were late

—and the necessity of looking after his luggage, he quite forgot me, and never said good-by. I stood on the inn steps till the guard wound his unmusical horn, and the four horses started, hoping that he would give me a wave of his hand at least; but no; the coach disappeared, and he never turned his head. "Ah! well," thought I, "the dear lad is thinking of his new career, and may be forgiven."

It was a very dark night, and but for the rare lamps at the street corners, I might almost have lost my way; I did not loiter in my walk home, therefore, but, with my cloak gathered tightly round my shoulders, made the best haste I could. When I came into the Minster gardens the keen autumnal winds met me; the moon was just rising, and began to gleam through the drifting clouds, making black, broad shadows on the grass. I passed through the gates by the Deanery into the Close; few people were abroad, and they seemed to be hurrying homeward out of the chilly night. There was a depressing sensation at my heart just then: perhaps it came from Stephen's forgetfulness of me—I can not tell; but it was the first time for many months that I had felt dull or saddened. I stood for a minute or two, to look upward at the moon, which had broken from its screen of inky cloud; the age-worn elms and poplars were writhing in the wild gusts that came sweeping round the Minster: in this moonlit mist it had a more ghostly air than usual, and the gray old houses in the Close, with their ornate gables, narrow windows, and deep porches, looked like haunted dwellings. From their gardens, where the sun shone rarely, came a smell of dank, rotting leaves and grave-mould; and the owl that lived in the huge sycamore in Chapter House Yard gave out a long, melancholy hoot. It is weak to dwell on presentiments, but it was inherent in my dreamy temperament.

My mother was on the look-out for me, thinking me long absent, and I met her with a smile.

"Did he go in good spirits, Kathie?" she asked, very cheerfully.

I replied that I thought he did, and we talked about him and his prospects till bedtime; but there were reserved fears with both of us, especially with her. Stephen's departure was naturally a source of anxiety; we should have felt better satisfied if he had left us in a more staid frame of mind, and with a higher sense upon him of his duties and responsibilities. But it seemed a moral impossibility to make any enduring impression on his elastic temper; there was a weak side to his character which made us tremble for him secretly now that he was removed from the influences and restraints of home.

A whole month we waited for the letter that he had promised my mother should receive in a few days. She looked more wan and troubled after each morning's disappointment, and when it came at last her fingers trembled so much that she could scarcely break the seal; she was obliged to ask me to read it, not having her glasses, she said; but ah! my poor mother, I knew it was for the tears in your eyes you could not see to read your careless darling's letter.

An emotion of rather unsisterly vexation hurried me through the half dozen lines that composed it. There were no details such as we expected; no description of the town, of his college, his masters, or his studies, but a contemptuous allusion to the Eversley boating-club, and a lengthy eulogium on the companions with whom he was already popular. He excused the brevity of the letter, for which his mother had been waiting exactly five weeks and three days, by saying he was going to join a wine-party given by one of his friends. When I had read it through once, my mother took it, and pored over the scanty lines as if trying to extract a grain of comfort or affection from them; but at last, with a sigh, she folded it up, and said she feared Stephen would always be thoughtless.

The time went on. His letters were never frequent, but I could have found in my heart to wish that they had been even less so, for they invariably cast a damp over us for the day. Never, by any chance, did he give us a cheerful account of his proceedings: he had to endure more privations and to fag harder than any man of his acquaintance; neither did he scruple to complain of the smallness of his allowance, and to beg for its increase. My mother was grieved for him, and retrenched our already scant luxuries to minister to his. Thereupon I privately wrote him a remonstrance. I laid before him the sacrifices our mother had made, and was still making for him, and besought him not to make her affection the instrument of his selfish indulgence. In answer I received a letter calling me unkind and unsisterly, and bitterly disclaiming his wish to cultivate his own pleasures at our expense; yet three posts later brought an urgent petition for ten pounds, with a postscript begging it might be kept from my knowledge, as I was so hard upon him. Nearly the whole quarterly sum of my mother's annuity went to satisfy this demand; and poor Jean, like Isabel before, lost her music-lessons. Unstable characters like Stephen are a vast trial to love and forbearance; but my mother still excused rather than blamed him, and I was ever willing to think and hope for the best.

The Christmas vacation he spent in London with our aunt Aurelia; and though it would have been pleasanter to have had him with us, we were cheered by knowing that he had more gayety there than he could have had in Eversley, and also that he was being weaned from the companions in whom he had delighted when at home. Isabel, too, was glad to have him, and each wrote very kindly of the other. Mr. Mayne again spent a few days with us at this time; but as his visit was as quiet as the former one, it calls for no particular details.

When Stephen returned to Oxford the demands on the

purse at home ceased, and we began to flatter ourselves that he was, at last, beginning to study as he ought; but still we heard of no distinctions, no triumphs of his brilliant talents; his examinations were not passed successfully, but got through indifferently. Mr. Withers said he was disappointed in him; and through young Francis Maynard there came, from time to time, rumors of wildness and reprimand, but nothing serious enough to increase our anxiety very materially.

In the spring of this year my grandmother Brande died suddenly at Crofton, leaving the bulk of her property to my aunt Aurelia, and a legacy of a thousand pounds to be equally divided among her son's surviving children. A codicil to her will, added during my visit, also bequeathed to me a further sum of five hundred pounds. To Miss Bootle was left a life annuity of ten pounds, in consideration of her long and faithful services. Stephen was excessively angry and disappointed at the smallness of his inheritance; he expected to share equally with Mrs. Marston, and had, I believe, incurred some heavy pecuniary responsibilities in that hope. The whole of his legacy melted away during his second year at college.

XXXV.

I was now fast approaching the end of my twentieth year. My little school had flourished, and my pupils had satisfied eager parents—one parent so much that he expressed a wish to establish me permanently in his home. This was Mr. Withers, of the Grammar School. The worthy master had been a widower many years, but he did not think his five children, or his ten lustres, constituted a serious objection to a marriage with me, and was deeply offended at my refusal.

On my twenty-first birth-night I sat up in my closet-room long after the others were in bed. I kept that Christmas eve in a mood of still happiness, and I saw the dawn of the day of the everlasting Sacrifice with a glad heart. Hope

had been near to me, and whispered a prophecy for the next year's spring which made my cheek glow in its solitude. I had waited patiently, and my reward drew near. No need to tell Felix now that sometime I should be his; no need to say to him any more, "Be strong and of good courage." He was as assured as I that we were rapidly approaching that fair city of our hope, whence we should journey together all the more peacefully and gladly for our long probation. No Christmas eve, before or since, has been like that one spent alone; never since have Christmas-bells had the same tone of promise and prophecy as they had that Christmas morning.

And this was the last time that my mother ever saw all her children collected round her at once. Stephen had come down from Oxford and brought Isabel with him. Felix Mayne was also with us. It was, indeed, a very contented and a very happy time, and deserves to be remembered among my best of days. Jean and I had made the west parlor look its gayest, and that Yule-tide saw a gathering of young hopes about its hearth such as it was never to see again.

Francis Maynard was there; and keeping close by my mother all the evening was Lilias Fenton, my first pupil once, but now a slim, sprightly girl of sixteen, and my brother Stephen's promised bride. She was a very pretty, innocent creature, gentle tempered and affectionate, but so frail and delicate in constitution as to make all who were interested in her anxious to ward off from her the least sorrow. She was the only child of an eccentric antiquarian, Paul Fenton by name, who lived in one of the old houses in the Minster Close. He did not bear a very high character in our neighborhood, being a man of close, niggardly habits, reputed rich. But his child he valued above his money—yes, even above his own soul; for he had bartered that for gold in many a foul and dishonest deed that never saw the light of the sun. She was the one human kindness left to his heart—the solitary link which bound him to earth and heaven.

He had never shrunk from the world's dirty work, but toiled through its sloughs and murky places with a zeal that showed his spirit was in the labor. What he did or what he endured—how many hearts he trampled on as if they had been stones—how many luckless creatures he had crushed as he crawled through the filthy avenues of dishonest gain to an eminence in society which men's wealth-worship made respectable, it matters not now to tell. He never spoke of his early career: he was well contented to let the veil which covered it rest unlifted. It might have exhibited dark scenes of human degradation, and sins foul as the bones in a sepulchre, could we have raised it; but his iniquitous days were past and half forgotten, or only remembered in those dark hours when all the din and gratulation of success can not blind the eye to their hideousness, or harden the ear to their rebuke.

Lilias had been left much to her own devices until her father consented to her coming to me; and then, being of a most teachable and intelligent disposition, she learned quickly. She attached herself warmly to my mother, and became Jean's favorite companion: her beauty was an attraction to Stephen, but he presently loved her for her good, sweet nature; and I think we were all of us well contented when we heard that old Paul did not set himself against their attachment, and that they had exchanged rings, and were betrothed.

Isabel was very lively at our expense: she whispered to my mother that there was never so dull an assemblage of people collected together before; for Stephen and Lilias were one pair, Mr. Mayne and Kathie another, and Francis Maynard and little Jean a third; for her part, she considered lovers the very worst company in the world. She would enliven us with some Christmas songs, she said, and flew to the piano with that intent.

What an exquisite, happy voice it was! clear, trilling, and

natural as the tone of a bird. Even the lovers' talk ceased that we might listen to her; and I saw tears of wonder and pleasure glitter in my mother's eyes.

Little Ann came up with her faithful Joe on the stairs, and they were surprised by me seated in the painted window listening.

"Miss Kathie, it's like an angel's song," said Ann: "it is real beautiful."

Isabel was pleased at our praise, and was sweet as summer all the night: my mother and I thought she had outgrown her willful temper, and become quite gentle and unselfish. She was a most lovely girl to behold; even Lilias Fenton looked like a pale weed beside her richly-tinted face, and tall, proud form. She appeared older than she was, from a certain quick, impatient way she had, and an imperious little gesture of her head, which betrayed that she was conscious of her charms and valued them.

Francis Maynard would jest at her, and call her a fair shrew, and feign that he lived in dread of manual correction whenever he was in her presence. "Has Petruchio come yet?" he asked, in a sly whisper.

"I shall never mate with a Petruchio," cried she, scornfully. "Katherine was not tamed; he was only hood-winked. You do not tame a lioness by shutting her up in a cage. Petruchio made his shrew a hypocrite; he should not have tamed me so; I would have killed him rather," and her eye had a dangerous spark in it as she emphasized the avowal with a slight stamp of her foot.

She marched the length of the room with her neck up and her nostril quivering, then came back among us with a shy, ashamed smile, and my mother drew her down to a seat beside her.

"I hope yours will be a gentle taming, Isabel," whispered she.

I remembered later how the child sat quiet after this, with

her hands lying lightly folded on her lap, and her face bent down, while we were all talking merrily around her; she took no part in our conversation; and when Francis Maynard, after a while, asked her suddenly, "Are you seeing pictures in a magic glass, Isabel?" she jumped up with a start and a sigh that made us all laugh. She feigned to be displeased, and went back to her music, where I think she must have played her reverie, for it was a strange, wild thing—very melancholy sometimes, and sometimes madly gay.

"What is that?" Francis inquired, bent on teasing her.

She made no reply, but went on with a plaintive melody; the music seemed to trickle from her fingers like water in sunshine over a shallow bed. Presently every voice sank into silence, for a solemn hymn broke on us suddenly, then the thrill of bells, and both died into a low, wailing strain which made me shiver.

"Oh, Isabel, don't play in that way; it is like a requiem," cried Stephen. "Who taught you those doleful ditties? Give us something inspiriting."

And forthwith she struck into a march; but by-and-by that, too, sank into a subdued movement, and when the sound swelled again, Felix exclaimed, "That is the 'Dead March in Saul,' Isabel."

"Yes, I can not help it; nothing comes to me to-night but dirges," replied Isabel; and she played it to the end.

My mother smiled, and began a new theme, and the piano was shut up. After that came supper, which broke the charm of quiet imposed on us by the music, and the rest of the evening was all cheerfulness and gayety.

Stephen and Francis Maynard would have snap-dragon; and, burning their fingers in the pursuit of raisins, were laughed at for their pains most merrily by Isabel and Lilias, in whose service they suffered. Then they burned nuts in the fire in pairs to see who loved them; and Francis showed Isabel himself and her blazing peacefully together, while Lilias's

representative flew away from Stephen's into the remotest corner of the room. My mother told them this was not the night for burning nuts, and so they were not likely to give a true prophecy.

Then there were Christmas healths and kind wishes, and more talk round the Yule logs, and then parting—Stephen taking Lilias home, and Francis Maynard reluctantly departing to his lodgings at his uncle Withers's, who himself was keeping Christmas, with all his young family, at his father's house in Norfolk.

Stephen presently returned shivering, saying it was a bitter cold night, and I left them to go round the house, as my custom was, to see that all was safe, and the door into the court barred and locked. On coming to the red door, however, I found that Ann's Joe had not yet departed; and, from what I heard, he must have been supplicating for a kiss: "Come, give me one, Ann; don't be cross; only one," said he, in an uncouthly tender way.

"I sha'n't, then," was Ann's curt reply.

Poor Joe entreated yet a while longer, till Ann, exasperated at his stupidity, exclaimed, "Can't you help yourself, Joe?" a permission of which he liberally availed himself, and then departed happy.

Ann came in, looking rosy and triumphant. "Joe's just gone, Miss Kathie," said she, cheerfully: "this has been a real good day, I call it."

XXXVI.

Three days after Christmas Mr. Mayne returned to Crofton. Isabel was to remain with us a few months, and Stephen's vacation was not expired. My brother's presence did not add to the comfort or peace of our home. Age and mixing in gay society had not improved him: he had assumed an air of superiority over us, which would have been merely ridiculous had it not been accompanied by a surliness

and moroseness of temper quite insufferable. Abroad and in society he could be as genial and gay as ever, and though exacting with Lilias, he was gentle to her; but to his own family he was generally moody and indifferent. After Mr. Mayne was gone, he rarely passed an evening at home, and habitually staid out late.

I remember one night especially; Isabel, Jean, and Ann were all gone to bed, and as my mother was not well, I wished her to go too, but she would not. The fire was mended up, and she sat by it a long while wrapped in a shawl, and talking a little at intervals. I then began to notice how she was ageing, and how deeply care was telling on her face and strength.

Twelve o'clock struck; one o'clock struck; still Stephen did not come. She rose, and began to pace the room to and fro. It was a bitter night, and the snow had fallen so thickly as to deaden every tread; and even yet the wind came laden with white flakes on every gust. I joined my mother in her walk. Every body knows these waiting agonies: how at the creaking of a loose board you start and cry, "He is coming!" how you pause to hearken to each passing footfall; how loud the clock sounds through the hushed night; and often, often, the throb of your own heart too. My mother's face was ashen white, but she refused to let me wait alone; and when she was weary she lay down on the couch and watched the fire. I occupied myself by pulling down the Yule garlands, now crisp and dry with the heat of the room.

"Hush, Kathie, darling! I can not hear for those rustling leaves," my mother said; so I took one of Felix's books, and, sitting on the hearth-rug, read a long time to myself.

The clock was on the stroke of two, when there came a stealthy knock at the outer door. I descended hastily, and let my brother in. He stopped a minute or two in the hall to shake the snow from his clothes, and then followed me up to the parlor. His face was flushed, and he was in a moody, irritable temper.

"You are late to-night, my boy!" said my mother, gently; "where have you been?"

"Never mind," was the surly reply.

For a few seconds my mother stood gazing at him: her eyes were dry, and she said not a word of reproach or complaint, but most touching was her voiceless agony. What a harvest was this for her who had sown with so much care!

"Good-night, Stephen; you will go to bed soon: these late hours will destroy your health," she said at last, bending forward to kiss him. He repulsed her impatiently, and turned away his face.

The tears were coursing down her pale, worn cheek as we went up stairs together, but she was anxious to excuse him even yet.

"Do not think of it, Kathie; you see he is not quite himself to-night," she said.

But for her the frequency of slight could never dull the pain: her dream of maternal pride, shorn of its beauty, looked ghastly now in its pall of faded love. It was a heavy sorrow for all those hearts who put their faith in Stephen Brande: their deepest devotion would be but a thankless sacrifice for one so careless and so selfish.

XXXVII.

"Oh, Kathie, what a frightful pile of work! When will it all be done?" cried Isabel, as Ann came into the parlor with a pile of linen which she had been submitting to a softening process down in the kitchen.

"We'll all be fain to see the day, Miss Kathie," observed Ann, smiling broadly; "solidly speaking, Mr. Mayne is the best and kindest gentleman, except old master, that ever I came acquainted with."

My sisters stood looking at the white heap reflecting; then Jean turned to me with a pretty, puzzled air, and said, "We might think, Kathie, that you had never had any clothes be-

fore, or else that you suspect you will never be allowed a fresh supply. Do all girls have such a quantity of new things when they marry?"

"Most have: it is the custom."

"Then, as soon as yours are finished, I think I'll begin mine. I am fourteen now, and may expect my time to come by four-and-twenty. In ten years, with great diligence, I might accomplish them. Don't you think so, Kathie?"

"Possibly," I replied, mimicking her demure air; "possibly you might, but not without the most serious application: you would have to relinquish every thing else, of course."

"I shall speak to my mother about it: it is not pleasant to be all in a fuss at the end. I wonder if it is with a view to being married some day that Ann knits all those worsted stockings. She never does any other work; she must have scores of pairs: I should like to inquire."

"Do, Jean, if your curiosity is very lively."

Ann again appeared, breathless, and cast down more linen.

"That's the last of it, thank goodness!" she ejaculated, giving her cap a vicious pull to one side: "you'll want a wagon and horses to fetch you and your traps away, Miss Kathie."

"One small pony brought them up stairs," I returned, smiling at the grimaces Ann made while giving her arms a little comfortable friction.

"It is time you thought about marrying, Ann; perhaps you do think of it," said Isabel.

"Of course I do, Miss Isabel; I'm getting my stockings ready."

"Ah! Ann, you heard what I said," cried Jean.

"Yes, I heard every word."

"Well, then, Ann, tell us how many pairs you have."

"I don't rightly know myself, Miss Jean, but I could count 'em if you're so curious; there's not much over thirty pair."

"Thirty pair of worsted stockings! You can never wear them out, Ann."

"They'll come in, Miss Jean, never fear. Keep a thing seven years, and turn it; keep it another seven years, and turn it again, and you'll find a use for it at last. My stockings won't go a begging. I've knitted 'em of all sizes. You see, Miss Kathie, I do think a bit now and then, though Missis says I'd lose my head if it was not fast on my shoulders."

"Your pans are in most danger now, Ann," said my mother, who entered at the moment; and Ann decamped, indulging in objurations on the carelessness of men in general, and of Joe Tinman in particular, who had promised *faithful* to call for those pans in the morning, and had forgotten.

Making bride's clothes! Many a long hour did I and my sisters spend over that pleasant work during those winter months, plotting and planning, dreaming and hoping. My bird, which had grown quite tame now, would come out of his cage and warble us a song while perched on my shoulder, and Jean and Isabel would be chorus. Miss Bootle, who, since my grandmother's death, had been so fortunate as to be elected to a place in the Old Maids' Hospital in West-gate, sometimes joined us, and brought gossip without stint: one evening, in the dusk, she arrived with Charlie under her cloak; but, as he became demonstrative at the sight of my bird, he was sent down to the kitchen, where he sullied his white coat (newly washed for the visit) during his investigation of certain mouse-holes behind the ledge where Ann put the kettles and pans. I found afterward that the old lady carried him, as a delicate attention, to see her special friends, and that she was hurt at my not letting him stare my bird into fits. She, on another occasion, brought me a piece of exquisite old point lace, which she pressed on my acceptance with many significant smiles, and nods, and half words, which Isabel imitated with ludicrous exactness and gravity; and

another time, to my dismay, she told the story of Mr. Longstaff's courtship, and wound up by saying, "From an ardent lover, Kathie converted him into a friend and a brother."

We were very merry over our work, especially when the companion was with us. She delighted to help us, and to see each finished garment folded away in a drawer, where all were to lie until a certain day in April. I used to stand looking at them myself sometimes for a few quiet minutes, and thinking what a happy wife I should be, and how dearly I should love and reverence Felix. My habit of day-dreaming was still as strong as ever, notwithstanding that the fulfillment of my hopes drew nigh.

And thus the time went on; Stephen being gone back to college, and we three girls with my mother at home, till the wild March winds began to blow.

XXXVIII.

One Thursday morning Ann brought in my customary letter; I carried it away to my room to read, and when I came back and began to sew, my mother said, "Kathie, will you write to Stephen to-day? It is very strange that we have never heard of him since he went back."

She looked anxious and disappointed; and, indeed, his neglect was very painful to all of us. Presently in came Ann again with a message. "Mr. Withers's respects, and will Miss Kathie go up to his house at eleven o'clock."

"He wants to consult you about the children," said my mother.

Since Christmas I had discontinued my school, and we thought this supposition the most natural.

At the hour appointed I went to the schoolmaster's house. Being ushered into his study, I found him still in his shawl-patterned dressing-gown, with a black velvet skull-cap covering his grizzled locks. He received me kindly, but nervously; offered me a chair near the fire, tried two or three him-

self, and finally, balancing himself on the edge of the table, took up two open letters and handed them to me.

"This business is a very painful one, Miss Brande; will you have the goodness to read those letters?" he said.

For a minute or two I was so startled that the lines waved up and down before my eyes, and I could not read a word. Oh, the sickness of heart—the utter misery that fell on me when at last the sense was made out! Stephen was in disgrace—in debt; he must leave Oxford immediately; what for, he left us to imagine. He characterized his misdoings as *folly*, and feared his expulsion would be a great trial to his mother. *Feared!* He knew it would.

Mr. Withers was delegated to break the bad news to her. The master of his college spoke in more severe terms. Young Brande, he wrote, was totally unfit for the profession to which his friends had destined him. During his short career at the University he had been reprimanded many times; his conduct was marked by every vice and every folly; his extravagance, indolence, and contempt of rules dated from the beginning; no plea, no extenuation whatever appeared. The letter ended by saying that Stephen had contracted debts for which his family must be responsible.

For some moments after the perusal of these two miserable letters I sat quite silent, and, as it were, paralyzed. I was recalled to myself by the sound of Mr. Withers's voice. "Give me the right to answer these two letters, Miss Brande," he was saying rapidly, as he stood holding one of my passive hands; "let me take this misguided young man under my care. Be my wife. I would be very kind to you, Kathie. Do not decide hastily; it is not my wish to take advantage of your position."

"Stop, sir," I interrupted, withdrawing my fingers; "I am—I was to have been married this spring."

He flushed all over his face; walked to the window, and then came back. "You should have told me before," was all

he said for a minute; then, "Consult with your mother, and let me know. I will do all I can for you."

I thanked him, and rose to go; he held open the study door for me to pass out.

"Believe me, Miss Brande, I am most truly grieved for you," he said, shaking hands hurriedly.

I hastened out into the streets, grasping the two letters under my shawl.

Often the heavy rains fall at noontide. These were the first drops of the thunder-shower that washed away so many flowers—uprooted so many tender plants; no softening, vivifying rain, under which new buds spring up to blossom on the earth, but a wild tempest of icy wind and driving sleet that pierced to my inner heart, and left traces of sad wreck behind.

XXXIX.

When I re-entered the parlor on my return my mother was not there, only Jean and Isabel sitting at their work in the window.

"You have not been long away, Kathie; I have not finished setting on this frill yet," cried Jean.

"No matter; put them all away out of my sight; they will not be wanted," I replied, despairingly, sinking into a chair. My limbs failed me; I was as weak and weary as if I had walked ten miles instead of as many dozen yards.

"Oh, Kathie, what has happened? Don't look so wild and white. Come up stairs before my mother sees you; she is gone out, but will soon be back."

Jean took my hand and guided me up stairs. I was perfectly passive; for the moment, all nerve and fortitude seemed to have forsaken me.

If tears had flowed, it would have been a relief; but they were frozen at the source by the touch of this great sorrow.

Jean took off my bonnet, and laid her soft cheek against

mine. "Tell us, Kathie, only tell us what hurts you," pleaded Isabel, who was on her knees beside me.

I suffered her to take the letters and read them, while I watched her face with a sort of dreary, helpless despair. Jean read over her shoulder. I saw her bite her lip to keep back her tears, and then turn away to the window. For a few seconds none of us spoke; you might have heard the beating of our hearts in the hush of the room.

"Here is my mother coming—oh, poor mother!" cried Jean, suddenly. "How shall we tell her? Don't look so wretched, Kathie, or it will be ten times worse for her."

I forced myself to calmness, smoothed my hair, and passed out of my own room into my mother's as I heard her coming up the stairs. The keen air had tinged her worn, faded cheek with a pale color: she looked cheerful, as if she had met with something pleasant in her walk. It seemed almost cruel to destroy this rare peace with our bad tidings. She did not notice our troubled countenances at once, but went to the dressing-table, and unfolded a parcel she had brought in—some fine cambric that I had commissioned her to buy for me the day before.

"Never mind that now, mother: we have news of Stephen," said I.

"Well! good news? He is not ill, is he?"

I gave her my brother's letter; the master's I kept back: no need to wound her with that, I thought.

Her fortitude shamed us all: except for the slight flutter of her eyelids, and that the flush of exercise faded, her face was quite calm. She read the letter twice through, then looked round upon us quietly. "Poor Stephen! my poor fatherless boy!" she said, sorrowfully; "he must need comfort in his trouble: fetch me the inkstand, Jeanie, and I will write to him directly. Bad companions have led him astray; but I am sure my boy has a good heart. Kathie, will you tell Ann to get his room ready? I shall bid him come home to us: I feel sure he has been unjustly used."

Indeed, my mother was to the full as indignant as she was sorrowful; and buoyed up for a while by this fallacious comforter, I left her inditing a letter to my brother, and went listlessly about the duty required of me.

All that afternoon I sat over my sewing; I knew it would not be needed, but the mechanical work acted as a sedative and a restraint on my perturbed spirits. All the consequences of Stephen's disgrace had shown themselves to me in one burst the moment I learned it, and now I thought them over, and tried to arrange them in my mind that they might be met with decent fortitude. Nothing must be done hastily; I would wait until my brother came home—till he gave us an account of his liabilities; then I would write to Felix Mayne.

In the evening Lilias Fenton came in to see us, and to her my mother poured forth the bitter story of her son's wrongs and trials. The poor girl wept abundantly, and was sure some unfriend had wrought Stephen's disaster. No doubt her tender little heart prompted her to send a cheering letter in the wake of my mother's, for she was absolutely of opinion that he could do no wrong. Isabel would have had me give them the master's letter, but I refused, and burned it instead.

XL.

The next morning's post brought a letter from Stephen—such a letter as it did us no good to read. It was entirely self-exculpatory: he blamed his home life, his early training, his friends, and his ignorance of the ways of society—anything and every thing, in short, but his own insubordination, idleness, and willful extravagance. He calculated that his debts were nearly eight hundred pounds; and if they were not paid, he went on to say, he could never hold up his head in the world again. So ended this precious epistle that was to fill us all with such dismay. He asked for forgiveness in-

deed, but not until he had shown himself far more sinned against than sinning; and added in a postscript that he had been misled into borrowing money in the expectation of a much more considerable legacy from our grandmother Brande. Young men, he stated, did it every day, and the tradespeople were all ready to give credit in the prospect of ultimate payment. He was also indebted in considerable sums to two private friends, and he hoped we would send him the means to satisfy their claims at once. Such debts were debts of honor, we were informed.

It was not for poor stay-at-homes like my mother and me to understand the usages of such company as Stephen kept, but to contract liabilities without having the actual power in hand to liquidate them seemed to our ignorance but one phase—and that a most ruinous and treacherous one—of taking the money out of a neighbor's purse. Stephen had contracted his debts with nothing but an unfounded hope of ever paying them, and I do not scruple to say that we all felt very much ashamed of his unprincipled conduct. My mother could not refrain from tears.

"I knew he was weak to withstand temptation, but I never feared he could be seduced into any thing so manifestly culpable as this," said she. "It destroys confidence in him. You and I, Kathie, scarcely understand it; we would rather eat a dry crust than do what he has done."

Isabel advised that he should be allowed to bear the brunt of his misdoings. He deserved it, perhaps; but there was our good name, and his future, to be considered.

"The debts must be paid, Kathie," my mother said; "they must be paid—but how?"

She glanced round the parlor, as if it contained valuables that could be disposed of, though all its contents would scarcely have sold for as many pounds as Stephen owed hundreds.

"There is my five hundred pounds untouched; let that go," I replied, quietly. "It will pay the greater part. The

tradespeople ought to have their money the first: the others must wait."

"No, Kathie, no," cried my mother; "that would be unjust: I can sell my annuity."

"My plan is the best; let my legacy go. I shall still have something left, you know; indeed, we all shall. Your annuity you must give up for a year or two; and, meanwhile, the school must be made to support us all. I will go round among my old pupils; if they do not come back, others will be found."

My mother looked questioningly at the work in my hand. I understood her, and answered, "We shall not be married this spring; we must practice waiting a little longer, or give each other up."

My voice was steady, but my heart felt as cold as if I were pronouncing my own death sentence.

"Oh, Kathie, can not I do something? Let me do something," pleaded Jean, clinging with both her arms round my neck. "I am growing up; Stephen may get a situation; need you be sacrificed?"

"Be still, Jean; I have said my say; there is nothing more to be suggested, and nothing more to be done till Stephen comes home."

I put her from me with an affectation of sternness; another tender word, and I must have broken out into a passion of weeping. My mother followed me to my room, whither I went to look my sorrows in the face, and grow familiar with them: "Kathie, Kathie, God will reward you," she said, with her face pressed to mine; "now more than ever you are a comfort to me, my child."

Left alone again, I took out Felix Mayne's last letter, and read it through twice, not in expectation of finding comfort therein—for every expression of hopeful love and trust was a pang—but because such was my custom. It is well to regard our position boldly: to say, This must I do, this must

I forego, this must I endure. Cowardly shrinking avails us nothing: it is easiest to stand to our work and do it. I took my difficulties, figuratively, in my two hands, and examined them with critical coolness: at the first shock the suffering was less than afterward. I had not yet lived in the world so long that I need be sick of its burdens and wish to quit it, but from my narrow loop-hole of existence it looked a very different place from what it had done but one little week ago. I had waited and worked in hope; now I must wait and work in patience. It seemed as if I ought to give Felix up; but oh! I could not be so unselfish yet; I could not with my own hand uproot the deep-struck passion of my life, nor turn away from my lips the waters of hope, scant as they were becoming in the dry and thirsty land on which I had entered. Unknown sources of trouble were swelling up in turbid floods around our home. Poverty—close, pinching poverty—such as hitherto none of us had known, lay in wait at our threshold. By our hearth was no joy but such as each of us might carry in her heart to lighten the weary days.

Well, let us toil and be thankful. There are greater ills in the world than work and poverty.

XLI.

Isabel was wearying now to be gone back to Aunt Aurelia in London, and, an opportunity offering for her being put in charge of a person of our acquaintance during the journey, we sent her away. I was not sorry when she left us: she liked sunshine, and laughter, and luxury, and those pleasant things were now banished Percie Court. She could ill brook the close hand of poverty, or the shadow of hard work. I think she would have either pined and died herself, or worn us out with caprice and complaints had she staid among us.

Our great impatience now was for Stephen's coming. He sent no second letter, and for fourteen days we were kept on

the rack of suspense. At the end of that time he appeared, looking miserably jaded and ill, but determined to brazen out his disgrace. He had passed the interval between leaving Oxford and coming home in London—an interval, if we might judge from his appearance, of riot and debauch. My mother was cut to the heart, but she never reproached him once.

It was touching to see Lilias Fenton's mute distress when she came, eager to comfort him and raise his spirits, and he received her with careless rudeness—to cover, perhaps, his sense of shame.

I pitied her much as one would pity a poor fluttering, wounded dove, when there is a kite swooping down the sky to seize it. Of all the sorrows that can overtake us, surely the sorest, the most unbearable is the shameful ruin of what we love. I scarcely dared to look in Lilias's face after I had once seen her great grief: it seemed as if we were all guilty toward her.

We were not long in receiving a statement from Stephen of what he owed; but he kept back some matters until what he styled his "debts of honor" were paid in full. It was difficult to make him be sincere, for my mother's troubled calmness frightened him, and he thought that by leaving some things to creep out by degrees, he was lessening the force of the calamity.

For weeks and months bills kept flowing in from tradespeople both in London and in Oxford. I believe, in the end, the sum he first stated was nearly doubled. The share that fell to me from the thousand pounds left to us by my grandmother went to satisfy each claim in part, and my mother's annuity was set aside for the payment of small installments, yearly, until the whole should be liquidated. This part of the business my mother herself transacted, and, I must say, those individuals who had been misled into allowing my brother credit were much more considerate and patient than we had any right to expect from them.

XLII.

One afternoon, about a week after Stephen's return home, I betook myself to my closet, spread paper before me, and began to write to Felix Mayne. It was a long, a hard, a bitter task; but I had nerved myself to it, and I did it. I set my position before him—my plain and visible duty, as it seemed to me; my mother ageing and declining in health; Jean yet a child; Stephen unprovided for; myself the only worker of the household. I offered to break our engagement, the fulfillment of which seemed so visionary. This would be the best for him. Of myself I said nothing.

Then I laid out on my bed the wedding clothes, made and unmade, folded them straight, and laid them carefully away in the drawers, scattering over all some sprays of sweet lavender and a few tears—the hottest and bitterest, because, perhaps, the most selfish I ever shed.

Three days after came a letter from Felix, which gave me the comfort I much needed in the assurance of his faithful love. His disappointment, and his wrath against its cause, he scarcely tried to conceal; but he wrote cheeringly, and strove to persuade me that a few months would see Stephen in a situation, able to support our mother, and to set me free. Ah! I knew the delusion of this suggestion. Never could I trust my mother to his care now: that confidence was quite done away with.

During Easter week I went round among the ladies in the Close who had already befriended me, and told them that it was my purpose to reopen my school, which had been closed since Christmas. Some insinuated a wish to know the reason, and, their curiosity being satisfied, they expressed their regret, and promised me their good offices. This resulted in the return of five of my old pupils and two new ones. With these I began my career afresh. On the third morning two of Mr. Withers's little girls walked in, just as if they had never

been from under my care, and the green baize benches were again filled.

My mind was now comparatively at ease. Here was the source of a mean and scanty subsistence for us; bread—daily bread—but little else. Truly, indeed, "is evil wrought by want of thought." When my brother saw before his eyes hourly the consequences of his imprudence, he must have felt some qualms of repentance; but, for the most part, he preserved a sullen silence, as if he suffered wrongfully, instead of being the cause of such open and hidden calamity to all who belonged to him.

Imagine me now living quietly on from day to day, busied in the same unvaried round of duties; not quite spiritless, not quite hopeless, but growing graver and stiller as my brief summer wanes to its close. (I have had my season of light and glow, and must be content to let the shadows creep up over the flush of noon. Who knows but beyond them may stretch a long evening of quiet beauty?)

XLIII.

The next thing to be thought of, when Stephen's college difficulties were reduced into shape, was to provide him with a situation: here his pride came out in a most disagreeable way, and threatened to prove an insuperable obstacle to all our efforts. He absolutely refused to accept of any employment in Eversley, because he fancied that he should be lowered in the estimation of former associates if he were known to be engaged in the drudgery of a provincial lawyer's or banker's office; for any thing but a clerkship he was equally unfitted by education and by disposition.

After a time, I began to pity him sincerely. The bane of his life now was "nothing to do:" no work, and not the means of amusement. He avoided his old companions and former haunts, and only wandered about the Close after dusk, when people were mostly within their houses. It was

melancholy to see him, in his strong and beautiful youth, idling away his time in a little room; dozing, or smoking, or reading trashy books. He had brought down his guns, his fishing-tackle, boxing-gloves, portraits of famous horses, sporting characters, and theatrical notorieties, and embellished his hutch with them; and he staid among them nearly all the day, away from the rest of us. It never appeared to trouble him that he had brought such poverty among us, or that he depended on our labor for support: he was just the one pair of slothful hands in the house; and though he did say sometimes that he wished he had a situation, he made no personal exertion to find one. The friends to whom we could apply for counsel in our strait were soon counted over —they began and ended with Felix Mayne, Mr. Withers, and old Paul Fenton; Stephen's were not likely to benefit him much now.

In this interval my brother contrived to re-establish all his influence over Lilias. One afternoon I was at the antiquary's house when he came in.

"Where is Lilias to-day?" was his first question of the old man.

She came in while he was speaking, with the blushing smile on her fair young face that always greeted him; she took some work into her hands, and sat toying with it idly, while Stephen leaned over her chair, and talked to her in whispers. Paul had fallen into a doze over a piece of yellow parchment covered with cabalistic figures. It was like going back a couple of centuries to sit in that quaintly furnished parlor, crowded with curiosities and relics of past times. There was nothing but stiff-backed oaken chairs, covered with faded tapestry, to rest upon; costly bureaux, inlaid with ivory and precious woods, were grown dark with smoke and age where they stood, and the blackened pictures on the wainscot scarcely showed, in the twilight of the room, even the outline of their subjects. The weird old man seemed to belong

to his possessions, and they to him; but bright-haired Lilias moved about among his musty treasures like a sunbeam in a charnel-house. It was a pleasant thing to see her at this period. Her step was always light and bounding; soft, sweet gushes of song came trilling from her lips; I even thought that with happiness she was gaining strength and a more hardy bloom. Stephen must have taken a delight in her kindling eyes, that met his with such a tender sympathy; her cheek, that glowed at his coming; her heart, that loved him with all its tenderness and all its might. Oh, brother mine! you were not worthy of that pure, that holy love. It pleased your man's vanity; it flattered your self-esteem; but its grace and beauty were as much wasted on you as are morning dews on sterile rocks.

I remember his calling me into his hutch one evening, and saying that he wanted to talk about Lilias—a weakness in which I could not refuse to indulge him, though plenty of work awaited me in the parlor.

"Kathie, I want to give Lily some little present," said he: "don't you think she would like it?"

"Yes; I am sure she would value any thing from you: what prevents you from making it?"

"Nothing but the lack of cash."

In this dilemma I could not help him, so I said nothing, and he began to disarrange the internal economy of my work-box, which I had brought in and set down on his table, whistling in a subdued tone to help him to solve his difficulty. I wondered he did not think of selling those expensive and useless things on the walls of his room. At last a brilliant idea struck him.

"Kathie, you never sport any trinketry: have you nothing laid by that you could part with?" He reddened slightly, when, scarcely thinking him in earnest, I glanced quickly up into his face, but his confusion enlightened me.

I said I had some ornaments, but none of modern fashion:

all I possessed had been given to me by my mother or my grandmother. He bade me make haste, and fetch them at once; so I went to my closet, and brought forth my treasure-box. The only thing I laid aside he coveted greatly, but I would not resign it, for a reason I had; and, finding me inexorable on that point, he at last selected a little topaz brooch set round with three rows of seed pearls, which was sufficiently simple and pretty not to betray its antiquity.

"And your are sure Lilias will not know it?" he asked, anxiously.

"She has never seen it: my grandmother gave it to me when I was at Crofton, and I have never worn it since."

He then ordered me to cut off a lock from his handsome head, to be inserted into the little box at the back of the brooch, showing a good deal of anxiety lest my scissors should reap too much of his auburn glory.

"I remember you playing me a trick once, Kathie, and that was the only time I ever saw my mother really cross with you, for you had spoiled her darling's beauty. Do you recollect? It was one fifth of November, and some of us had been letting off fireworks, and almost blowing ourselves up. I came home all singed, and you would shear my hair until I looked like a little Puritan: don't play me such a trick now, for if you do I'll never forgive you."

While recalling this delinquency, he had held me at arm's length; but, the warning given, I was permitted to prune one crisp, round, glossy curl, and to lay it carefully in a box with the brooch to be carried to the jeweler's.

"You are a good little soul, Kathie, and I'm much obliged to you," said my brother, cheerfully: "I'll do you a good turn some day too; you deserve it."

And, indeed, he did afterward present me with a rich canary-colored bonnet ribbon, with scarlet edges, much too resplendent to be worn, and so I saved it very carefully, and met with it years later speckled with mildew, and still in all

the rustle and crispness of an unworn silk: its edge of poppy-color was quite gone.

The next day Stephen showed me this little gift before he carried it to Lilias; the jeweler had cleaned it, and as the pearls were quite pure, it might have been just bought out of his shop, my brother remarked. Many and many a time did I see this little gift of her lover's fastening the black velvet that encircled Lilias's fair throat. She set as high a value upon it as she could have done if it had been purchased by his life-blood.

From this incident it may be conjectured that Stephen's finances were sunk very low, but when he had been about a month at home I found them much recruited. Not knowing that he had any means of making money, I questioned him as to how he had obtained it, and extracted from him a reluctant confession that he had spent the evening before with some old friends, and that they played cards.

"Stephen," said I, quite angrily, "you are bent on your own ruin, and ours too. Who will employ you with such a habit as that of gaming? You must give it up—you *must*."

There was this peculiarity in Stephen's temper, that when any person assumed a decisive mastery over him, he gave in; he did now: he begged me not to let my mother know or Mr. Withers, and promised solemnly never to play again. So long as he remained in Eversley he kept his word.

XLIV.

It was at this time that, with many misgivings, and more quiet laughs at my absurd presumption, I selected from the papers in my cupboard some of those which appeared to me the best, and inclosed them to the publisher of a very popular periodical. With my own hands I dropped the packet into the box at the post-office, having at the moment a very fluttering pulse and crimson cheek, as if I were committing a

crime in which I feared to be detected. It is my belief that if the act had been charged upon me there and then, I should have been guilty of the moral delinquency of denying it; but, as I had told my intentions to no one, there was not that to fear. When the venture was fairly gone out of my possession, and no amount of wishing could bring it back, I felt almost frightened at what I had done. I had sent my name and address to a perfect stranger, with copies of verses which now I know to have been wretched, puling stuff, offering him these precious maunderings for his magazine.

I suppose I must have deluded myself into some hope of success, though I tried to say every morning, "Oh, it is not likely I shall ever hear any more about it!" yet at the post hour I was always on the watch to intercept letters, with a dull pain of expectancy at my heart: nobody can imagine it for such a cause but those who have gone through it. But I might have spared myself all these quiverings and false shames, for I never did hear any thing of this, my first and last literary venture. No doubt my note was read, and with its accompaniments fluttered quietly down into the editor's waste-basket—or perhaps it had the honor of lighting the editorial cigar, and its contents disturbed in no wise the equanimity of the smoker's mind. I had an idea that all editors smoked, to help them through their troubles in the shape of voluntary contributors; and, to say truth, if many of them resembled me, such a sedative would be highly necessary. When a month had elapsed I gave up all hope of hearing from the publisher, and made up my mind that my lucubrations had departed to the limbo of rejected addresses: probably the best thing that could have befallen them, both for them and me.

But it was a disappointment. We were—it is no use mincing the matter—we were very poor. I do not mean to insinuate sordid or degrading poverty—that never came near us—but it was the struggle to maintain appearances as they

had been, which necessitated a close and rigid economy. Jean gave up her music-lessons again; we left off our subscription to the book society, and, in short, dispensed with every thing but absolute necessaries: yet the west parlor was not despoiled of any of the little decorations and improvements we had effected; my father's valuable books still filled their shelves, and while suffering most, we had a pride in keeping all neat and pleasant around us, that, as Jean said, we might not seem to ourselves to be ill off.

The dear child's lively temper was a great comfort to all of us at this time; she was always cheerful, always helpful: her spirits rose in proportion as our difficulties increased, and she had ever a hopeful word for me when weary and flagging over my daily task-work. And not words only, but useful assistance she could give among the children in the school, so that I added four more to my number.

It was now, when the excitement of the sorrow was past, that I most felt its weight. The spring which I had counted on with such glowing hopes was a very heavy season to me—so heavy that I can not express it. Trifles in such frames of mind have a vast influence over us: to one more little straw our weakness succumbs. I call to remembrance one Saturday afternoon, while Stephen was still with us. He had been teasing me—not, perhaps, ill-naturedly, but yet in a way that chafed me—about my long engagement and Felix Mayne's constancy. He saw me picking some leaves which were blighted from one of the rose-trees that had come with me from Crofton, and that prompted him: he began to make jesting comparisons between the plant which seemed to be drooping and dying gradually, and me in my pale, gray life. It did flash into my mind that it was he who had intercepted my sunshine; but I made no retort, and went on with what I was doing.

"How quiet Dick is this afternoon!" observed Jean, whose low-hummed song lacked its usual accompaniment. I recol-

lected suddenly that I had never heard his voice in the morning, and reached out my hand to take down the cage from above the flower-stand. One glance was enough: poor little Dick was dead. Stephen came to look at it.

"You ought to have a *post-mortem* examination," he suggested, laughing.

Jean bade him be quiet and go away, which he presently did, with a sneer at our wasted sensibility. Foolish or not foolish, weak or not weak, there were many tears shed over that little dead bird. I remembered how he would flutter to the edge of his cage when I came down early in the morning, and how merrily he would sing for the few minutes when he had his liberty alone in the room; I remembered, too, whose gift he had been, and what an old friend he was.

Jean and I buried him under a thorn-bush in the garden, and you can not think how hushed and silent the west parlor seemed with him no longer trilling his song in the sunshine. The cage was put away out of sight that afternoon.

XLV.

One morning, while the west parlor was still filled with little scholars, Mr. Withers called and asked to speak with me or my mother. He was shown up into Stephen's hutch, and there I found him conversing with my brother, and looking very grim when I went in.

Mr. Withers had not ceased to manifest an interest in his old pupil, ill as he had fulfilled his predictions; and his present visit was for the purpose of telling us that his brother-in-law, Mr. Penwitham, a banker in London, had a vacancy for a junior clerk, and that he had consented to receive Stephen in that capacity on his recommendation.

"The salary is eighty pounds for the first year," said our kind friend: "you will have to go on trial for a month, and if you acquit yourself steadily during that period you may get forward; but if you choose to waste this opportunity, I wash my hands of you entirely."

My brother was profuse in his expression of thanks; but Mr. Withers cut him short. "Deeds, not words, this time, young sir," was his grim rejoinder. "Penwitham is willing to befriend you, but his clerks are only so many calculating machines: if they work well, all is right; if not, he sends them about their business. I want you to understand that your good or ill fortune is in your own hands, and that I have no more influence to exercise for you."

"I will do my utmost to recover your good opinion, sir," said Stephen.

"I hope you will, for the sake of all belonging to you. The place is waiting for you now, and I should advise his going up to town immediately, Mrs. Brande; and remember, sir, you present yourself at Penwitham's without delay. With business men, punctuality is a cardinal virtue."

My mother said that he could leave Eversley in three days; she was only sorry he was to be removed so far from her: she regarded London as a vast net of temptation, spread and baited for the entrapping of unwary young men, and feared that he might become entangled in it.

"He can not go in leading-strings all his life, madam," Mr. Withers dryly remarked, in answer to her fears: "let us hope that the false step he has already made will make him take heed how he walks. Come to me to-morrow, Stephen, and I will give you a letter of introduction to Penwitham."

My brother apostrophized his kind master as a "crusty old tiger" the moment he was out of hearing; but he was overjoyed at this prospect of emancipation from the dreary dullness of home, and went off in haste to communicate the tidings to Lilias Fenton and her father. He returned in about two hours in a most remarkably surly temper: we wondered what could have overtaken him, for the mood lasted all day. I sat up with him long after the rest; and then, growing communicative, he opened his grievances to me with a very dismal countenance.

"Kathie, have you not always understood that old Paul Fenton was very rich?" he began.

"Report said so, Stephen, but his manner of living contradicted it; I never gave the matter a serious thought."

"That is so like you! Well, I always believed him to be miserly rather than poor, and now, according to his own account, it seems that he is really ill off. Lilias will have no fortune—nothing but what the old man may leave at his death: trumpery curiosities, pictures, and such rubbish!"

"Did you expect any thing more?"

"Of course I did; how can you be such a fool as to ask such a question, Kathie?"

When Stephen fell into his savage mood I always left him, and did so now. The next day he had come to himself, and, in a calmer humor, informed me that he had asked Paul what his intentions were concerning his daughter, and that the old man had stated his circumstances to be poor, and even embarrassed. The mercenary sentiments my brother expressed promised very ill for Lilias's happiness when it should be given into his keeping. Paul had stipulated that the marriage should not take place for three years, by which time there was a reasonable hope Stephen's prospects would be settled; and his disappointment about the money appeared greatly to lessen the hardship of this long probation.

We were very quiet after he was gone; his letters to us were rare; those to Lilias scarcely more frequent. Often after post time she would come over to our house to see if we had news from London, when the letter she carried in her bosom was a month old, at least; and after a little talk with my mother she went away comforted.

Thus the spring passed, and the summer with its holidays, which were not much holidays to us; and the little scholars were again conning their lessons in the west parlor. Felix's letters came regularly as the Minster clock struck; pleasant music they made in my heart, and coming so often

it was never quite empty of joy. Sometimes I used wantonly to afflict myself by fancying how wearisome the weeks would be were this waymark in their passage removed. I think my spirit would have failed, and that I never could have borne the burden of my day but for the vital strength of hope they kept alive in my heart.

XLVI.

One evening in the October of this year, as Jean and I sat idly on the hearth in the dusk, our scholars being gone home and the tea not yet brought in, we heard a parley going on at the foot of the stairs between Ann and some stranger: the talk was brief; and while we were wondering who it might be, a quick, firm tread came up the steps, which, from its echo of a certain foot I knew, made my heart beat foolishly fast. The door opened, and a tall figure loomed through the shadowy twilight.

"Who is it?" cried I, rising up with my face all in a glow.

"Who is it? Felix Mayne, Kathie!"

He held out his arms, and I am not prepared to deny that the meeting was as happy as it was unexpected.

Jean disappeared to apprise my mother of his arrival, and then he began to tell me how it was he came to Eversley at that season.

"I am on my way to Kingston, Kathie; I have exchanged duties with a man who has a large family, and dreads to remain in the place at this time; there is a dreadful epidemic showing itself among the poor—a malignant fever. I know the place well; it breeds pestilence."

"Oh, Felix!"

He looked down into my face.

"What dost thou mean, Kathie? You do not begrudge me to my work: that would be unworthy both of me and you."

"No, Felix, I dare not do that."

He stood with his back to the fire-place, looking away out of the window. There was an ardent, eager expression in his face, which recalled to me my grandmother's warning. I must strive to lay no check on this fiery spirit; it would bear neither curb nor rein from the most loving hand: my slavish, coward fears for him must lie mute in my timid heart.

"Kathie, I have found my work now, and only want my helper; when will you come to me?" he asked, turning his eyes full on me.

"Oh! I dare not think of it yet, Felix."

"Why not? Kathie, I must claim you before Christmas. Do you hear me? I *must* have you."

"Felix, do you remember a little paper book that you left with me the last time you were here? I found in it a sentiment of Luther's: 'It is not safe for a man to do any thing contrary to his conscience.' How can I do what you ask? What would become of my mother and Jean? It would be contrary to my conscience to leave them yet."

"Let me hear all about it, Kathie. What you have done, and what you have undertaken to do."

He drew a chair forward and sat down, listening very sternly to all I said, and interrupting me by no comment. When I spoke of the relief it was to our minds that Stephen had got a situation, he nodded acquiescence; and when I finished speaking, he said very quietly, "Kathie, you have culled yet another sentiment out of that commonplace book of mine, which I wish had never been within your reach: 'Say to all manner of happiness, I can do without thee; with self-renunciation life begins.'"

"No, Felix, no! I could not live without happiness!" I cried, eagerly.

"But you are learning that lesson, Kathie, and would try to force it on me also."

"You are going away now from comparative safety into an imminent peril, Felix, because you feel that there lies your duty. Would you turn back because I tremble for you—would you, Felix?"

He looked me steadily in the face for a moment or two, then answered,

"No, Kathie; I dare not be an unfaithful servant. But you would not ask it."

"And I only entreat you to be patient for perhaps a year. Nothing is periled by the delay. My duty is as plain to me as yours to you; let me do it."

"Kathie, recollect that your renunciation is not simply *self*-renunciation: you compel me to a sacrifice, which, being unwilling, is not worthy, like yours."

His tone, full of an almost bitter reproach, made my throat swell and my eyes glitter: I turned my face away to hide them; but that moment he was beside me, holding my hands, and saying,

"Tears! Oh, my darling! my Kathie! I am cruel: forgive me. Surely this little heart has enough to bear without my adding to its sorrows. Kathie, don't cry! don't cry!"

It did seem to me, at that moment, as if to expect him to wait and wait, year after year, with all a woman's faith and patience, were too much. I owed it to his love and tenderness that he did not accuse me of coldness or indifference, and on that plea cast me off, as incapable of understanding or returning his devotion.

The deepest, truest passion ever reposes in a simple faith.

"Kathie, you do with me what you will," he said, with a sigh. "Be as just to me as to your other claims. Take counsel with your heart instead of your cool little head. I know it will plead for me."

"Felix, I must not listen to you any longer; let me go and seek my mother, and tell her you are here. Jean has not found her."

"Not in this way, Kathie; you can not leave me in this way."

He held out his arms, and I crept into them weeping. My heart did plead then that there might be its rest always. When I went away up stairs to find the others, it seemed as if a voice of passionate entreaty followed me: "Kathie, Kathie," it wailed, "Kathie, why will you leave me?" But it was only fancy: the sound came out of my own soul.

XLVII.

Felix Mayne left us the same evening and went forward to Kingston. The tone of his letters soon betrayed that he was happier in the midst of his onerous duties there than he had ever been in quiet, secluded Crofton. One district of his parish was, he wrote, severely visited by the epidemic, being low, densely populated, and very ill drained. I always now looked anxiously for Thursday mornings, and often stood at the window into the court watching till the postman came. It happened, however, one morning, that some duty called me off guard; and when I inquired of Ann, just before going into school, if the postman had come, she replied,

"There was no letters, miss; I saw him pass ten minutes since."

The disappointment struck me very keenly; and when I thought that this was the first time Felix's letters had missed since we were engaged, it assumed a painful importance. Jean suggested that perhaps, during this sickly season, he might be so fully occupied in his parish that he could not make time for his usually long epistles so often. What the child meant for comfort only gave me more uneasiness. I imagined him ill, and incapable of writing. I, however, kept my fears to myself, and wrote to Felix, begging him to let me hear as usual from him, even if he sent but a blank sheet of paper, with his mottoed seal, "All's well."

For once my terrors were unfounded: Felix was well,

and hard at work among his people, he wrote; my letter had missed posting in time, because, when just finishing it, he had been summoned in haste to perform the last offices of religion for a poor man who was dying of the fever. But anxiety for his safety had palpably presented itself to my mind, and refused to be exorcised. I well knew how he would labor among his poor; with what devotion, with what self-forgetfulness: no hour too late, no case too desperate, no danger too imminent, where his duty bade him go.

My Christmas thoughts that year were lonely and sad. Felix could not come to us; he kept his festival in a vigil among the sick and afflicted; and my mother, and Jean, and I talked round the Yule-tide fire of the loved and absent ones who had made the west parlor so gay last Christmas-time. It was a sunshiny, warm day, and Ann said to me, as I stood looking out on the Close,

"Ay, Miss Kathie, a green Yule makes a full church-yard."

And the New Year began.

XLVIII.

What a terrible year that was! What a time of mourning from one end of the land to the other! Close upon the fever followed another pestilence, more cruel, more fearful than the first. Eversley suffered from it awfully. It became necessary to inclose a grave-yard without the walls, and there its victims lie, by the score and by the hundred, rich and poor, high and low together. That part of Kingston in which Felix Mayne lived was almost decimated. We wrote to each other twice a week now, and though his letters were sometimes not more than two lines, they brought me the peace and satisfaction of knowing that he still labored on unstricken in the midst of danger.

That spring the trees were sheeted with glorious blossom; the earth brought forth abundantly; the sky of that early summer was sultry blue; its air warm, soft, fragrant; yet

over the fairest scenes a livid phantom came sweeping silently, and wherever the shadow of its wings fell was the sound of weeping for those who return no more. The palace chamber could not shut it out; and it darkened, with its fearsome pall, the hearths of homes where Peace and Love were strangers, yet death a dread. Its foul breath came suddenly upon the cheek of health, and made mortality a loathsome thing—a thing to be thrust hastily under the sod. It snapped the strong cords of human love, and stood by beds where men perished—deserted of their kind. It met the mother fleeing from her children; the lover from his mistress; and hurled them back into the grasp of the grave they sought to shun. The heart of the proudest trembled at its presence. The lip of the sneerer quivered into a prayer as it went by.

Many were the souls that flitted that year through the Valley of the Shadow of Death: some, faint with the burden and heat of their day, longing to be at rest; some, looking back regretfully at the apples of Sodom, dashed untasted from their lips; some, with the lamp of faith brightly burning, and a glory shining on them from the near heaven. Many childless firesides it made; many orphans it bereft of all protection, and left them to meet the world-storms alone. Here one and there one; now the fairest of the flock, then the thriftless scapegrace—the black sheep; now the good house-mother, then the bread-winner—the head of the family; here the tender nursling, there the hoary head of the old man. The shadow fell upon them, and they were not. Our threshold it did not cross; but in one of the courts in the Barbican died Ann's mother: in the evening she was going about her work, strong and well; in the morning she was dead. This pestilence did its work swiftly.

"I am almost overtasked," Felix wrote to me about midway in July; "my rector has gone to the sea with his young family, and my fellow-curate has resigned his post, so that the whole burden of the parish rests on my shoulders. The

epidemic increases in malignancy; it seizes more, and ends in more cases fatally. A sort of terror has got hold of the people; they grow reckless, neglect ordinary precautions, and will not listen to advice; many die as much from fear of the disease as from the disease itself; or their depression of spirits lays them peculiarly open to its attack. Hannah is of the greatest service to me just now: so many of the wealthier people have forsaken the town that there are more hungry mouths to fill among the poor than usual, and I make her my almoner. She is a perfectly fearless woman, and goes with equal willingness among sick and well. I dare not regret your absence now, Kathie; perhaps, had you been with me, I might have thought my life more yours than my people's, and have left my work as others have done. I may hope to be preserved to you through all this troublous time; but if, my labor ended, I am called away, Kathie will remember that I have but fulfilled a faithful servant's duty, and that to such God says, 'Well done!'"

My tears fell fast as I read: this letter seemed to be written in a weary mood, as if the pen were often taken up, and laid down again by an unsteady hand: the lines were faint and irregular; the words sometimes half blotted out. I answered it that evening, but very cheerfully: it was for me to encourage him, not to depress. I told him that in Eversley the disease was growing less fatal; that people's faces no longer wore that blank of fear and suspicion which had been so common in the streets; the church-bells tolled less frequently; and we could walk about the town without meeting those gloomy funeral processions at every corner.

Five painful days I waited for another letter: a Thursday passed, and none came. On the Saturday I got a note from Hannah: its contents I guessed before they were read. My presentiments were realized. "My master has sunk through fatigue: the mind would not let the body rest," wrote the faithful woman: "he lies as still and as helpless as a bairn.

The rector has been forced to come back, and is grieved now that ever he went away: he has left his children at the sea, and stays here. The doctor says master has been overworked, and that it is a low fever he has taken; but he has no fears of him yet. He is quite himself, and bids me write every day, and you are to do the same."

By the next post—

"My dear master is worse; but the doctor tells us the fever must have its time. Dear Miss Kathie, could you come to Kingston? He has not asked this, but he talks about you forever; and I know it is what he wishes, only he is afraid about you. The rector has gone away to his own house, where he can be better attended to. I am sure I have no time for him now: I am not going to give up the care of my master to any of them hospital nurses. Miss Kathie, you have your mother and your friends to think for; so, if you are afraid of this fever, you must not come; but, if you are not given to be nervous, I should say you would be quite safe, and you know whom it would comfort to see your face. I do believe it would be better than wine or medicine to him."

Sunday though it was, I quietly packed up a little trunk, and told my mother whither I was going, and why.

"Kathie, I will advise you neither one way nor the other," she said, with serious tenderness. "You know what it is right to do, and what will console you in the worst event. But my impression is that he will recover."

"Oh yes, he will recover; but go, Kathie, go," whispered Jean; "I would, if I were you."

Miss Bootle, who came in to tea after afternoon service, did her best to dissuade me from my intention, assuring me that it was tempting death to enter Kingston. But for myself I had no fear: my only thought was how soonest to reach Felix.

XLIX.

It was about six o'clock of a sultry August evening when I arrived at Kingston. The artisans, factory-people, and dock-laborers were just leaving work, and the streets were full of hurry, noise, and confusion. Before I reached the quarter where Felix lived, there were many narrow lanes to thread, built in with lofty houses, very old and tottering, and evidently crammed to the roof with poor tenants. From the upper windows of these abodes fluttered lines of rags drying in the close, smoky air, and here and there a slatternly or bedizened head looked out to watch the passing stream below. What particularly struck me among the poorer people whom I met was the expression of haggard indifference on most of their faces, which passed into a startled affright as they came upon groups who were gathered to watch some funeral start from one or other of the crowded tenements. Eight of these melancholy assemblages I passed between the place where I left the coach and my destination.

When almost ready to drop with weariness I saw the church where Felix labored. It was a gray old edifice, with a handsome tower, and all round it was an upheaved strip of turf, which exhibited the neglect and desecration characteristic of town grave-yards. Close by the church was a small ivy-covered cottage — the Rectory — and here Felix lived. The sun shone full on the front, and every blind was down. I felt almost sick with fear as I went in at the little gate, and up the box-edged path to the door. Could it be too late?

Hannah opened the door, and her countenance reassured me, for she smiled gravely.

"I knew you'd come, Miss Kathie. I looked for you," said she, and led me into the parlor.

It showed but too plainly that its owner had not been there for many days. Dust lay white on the books, and the ink in the stand was dry.

"How is your master, Hannah?"

"The fever gains a little. I won't promise, Miss Kathie, that he'll know you," was the reply.

I turned away to the window for a minute or two, and she let me be. "And when may I see him?" I at length asked.

"If he wakes quiet I will tell him you are here; but if not, we must wait till eight o'clock, to hear what the doctor says. Oh, Miss Kathie, I do hope I have not done wrong in bringing you over to Kingston; but you do look tired and wan."

Presently she brought me some tea, and that revived me a little; but for three dreary hours I sat alone in that little room, wearing out my heart and my strength with woeful thoughts.

It was a very hot, dry evening; the air seemed filled with particles of fine white dust; and though I set the window wide, no freshness came in. The flower-beds were baked and cracked for lack of moisture, the grass parched, and the flowers drooping. The great old elms in the church-yard cast a cool shadow over the graves, but the Rectory garden lay unsheltered to the blinding sunshine. I was glad to see it fade gradually upward on the opposite houses, till only the garret windows glittered in its red rays; for though the twilight was close and stifling, still the dim grayness rested my aching eyes.

Twice the passing bell of the adjoining church had gone since I sat there, and once I had heard it answered by another some distance off. I tried to distinguish separate sounds in the confused hum of that great busy town, for every sense seemed sharpened into double acuteness by nervous anxiety.

There were voices—children's shrill, happy voices—at play under the church-yard wall; others more distant, mixed up with the roll of heavily-laden wagons, the rattle of lighter vehicles, and the tramp of thousands of work-weary feet. Then there was a rushing as of water through the sluice of a mill, and the whir! whir! of some machinery not far off,

which never ceased night or day except on the Sabbath. In the old elms were a few noisy, quarrelsome sparrows, and in some distant portion of the town a band of itinerant musicians were playing lively tunes; for, when the street sounds lulled for a minute or two, the melody reached me distinctly. Then I heard Hannah's cautious foot overhead, and the stir of a woman who was in the kitchen at work. I listened in vain for the sound of *his* voice, but, as Hannah came to me no more, I conjectured that he still slept.

It was past eight o'clock when the doctor's carriage stopped at the gate. The housekeeper met him at the door, and took him up to her master's room. He was a long time there, during which I sat at the stairs'-foot listening, as if by that his report would reach me the sooner. At last he appeared, with his naturally cheerful face much overcast. I asked if my seeing Mr. Mayne would be advisable, and he replied hastily, "Not to-night, my dear young lady; in the morning, perhaps," and passed out, just as if he were not inflicting on me twelve hours of wasting pain.

Hannah looked graver when I saw her again, and, in answer to my inquiries, she said, "Miss Kathie, he is just in God's hands. Come your ways now, and you shall see him: he knows you've come."

"But the doctor said, 'Not till to-morrow morning,'" I replied, eager yet hesitating.

"That was for you, not for master."

She opened the door and went in. It was a large room to the north, and felt cooler than the parlor. Felix lay white and still, like a mask of his former self, with great sunken eyes, and a dark hollow round them. He knew me, smiled faintly, and would have begun to talk, but Hannah laid her finger on her lips.

"Master, if you begin to talk she must not stay," was her mandate; and, obedient as a child, he held his peace, and just looked at me, and I at him.

Hannah brought vinegar to bathe his forehead; and this office she delegated to me at a sign from her master. I liked that he should claim my service, for then I felt it was my place to be there, and that my coming was of use. The very sight of him, altered though he was, comforted me amazingly. I did not see death written on his face, as I had feared.

But later, when I had gone out, and the fever regained its strength, his plaintive, delirious moan seemed to mock my hope. I heard my own name repeated again and again in an accent of entreaty; yet, when I went and stood by him, and laid my cool hand on his forehead, he asked what wan ghost it was that came when he called for Kathie.

"Kathie has left me, Kathie has left me," he kept repeating.

"No, she is here, Felix," I said, in my most cheerful tone: "she is watching by you."

His gaze dwelt vaguely on my face. "You are not *my* Kathie," was his reply; "my Kathie had a sunshiny look—you are pale: your eyes are heavy with tears. Kathie has left me."

Then he spoke rapidly about Crofton, and recalled our last evening in the school-room. "Kathie *did* love me: she loves me yet, though she is gone. She has faith in me, she confessed it: she will never forget it."

Then he seemed to recognize me, and said, "Kathie, after I have served for you all these years, it is cruel—it is cruel to put into my arms this pale Leah, disappointment."

I felt as if he reproached me—as if he were uttering some thought that he had long cherished against me, and that his love had striven with in vain. I drew back out of sight to hide my tears, and he began to talk of Arthur Crawfurd as if they were together; then he wandered to his mother, and his own childhood, and back to the time of the fever among his people. Hannah made me go away soon to rest myself, but before I slept she brought me word that the delirious

crisis was for the present over, and that her master had fallen into an exhausted slumber.

L.

These alternations went on for several days. All the time there brooded over the town a dry, scorching heat; a shadowless sun glared down on the parched earth; the air panted for thirst: all the time the mourners went about the streets; and the slow bell in the church tower, close at hand, repeated its doleful knell morning, noon, and night.

I left the house daily for an hour in the cool of the morning, to refresh my oppressed brain and relaxed limbs; the doctor urged it as needful to keep me in health, but it was always a season of deep, aching reflection. What should I do if Felix died? How vacant would the world be to me! how empty, how joyless all its labors and all its cares! Scarcely could I frame a petition for him: my heart yearned with an agony of love to save him, but felt its utter powerlessness even to pray for mercy.

One blazing day I went out through the lanes to the outskirts of the town, and found my way to the river bank. I sat down on the grassy slope with my feet almost touching the water, and watched the rippled shadows wavering in its depths—watched them through a mist of burning tears. They had told me that morning his life hung on the turning of a hair. For three days he had recognized no one. Only a constitution of iron, the doctor said, could so long have battled with the disease; but even it could not support the wasting fever beyond a certain time.

I struggled with my rebellious heart—struggled to say, "Thy will be done!" but it was with a regretful, impatient submission. My throat swelled; my heart seemed bursting; the pulses of my head throbbed violently.

There were reapers in the fields opposite whistling at their work, and hastening to gather the corn into stooks. I heard

one cry out that there would be rain before noon; and lifting my face, I saw clouds coming from the westward, and felt a breath as if the stagnant air were stirred at last. It cooled my head, and filled my heart like a whisper of hope; and when great plashing drops came dancing down upon the river, and the sun was shrouded by a slaty mass of thunder-clouds, I rose up thankfully, and sped back to the Rectory in haste.

Hannah said it was a gracious rain, and that since the west wind began to blow she thought her master had seemed to revive. The doctor had told us it would be thus.

LI.

The rain held for many days, and during its continuance Felix sensibly revived. The burning glassiness left his eyes, and a deathly pallor replaced the fever flush. He was a gaunt, hollow-eyed skeleton, very dismal and grim to contemplate; but the fatal shadow that had been lurking about his bed had vanished. We were all recognized and greeted when we came to his room now, and he even began to exhibit some of that willfulness and perversity of disposition that Hannah asserted had always characterized him. Every day at noon he trailed like a ghost into the adjoining room, which had been temporarily fitted up as a parlor, and there he made me wait on him hand and foot. He was duly exacting, but then he was always pleased and grateful; and be sure he could ask no service that it did not make Kathie the happier to render. Hannah's office was become almost a sinecure, and his improvement was so rapid that the doctor began to talk of a removal into the country. Felix did not receive the proposition with favor, for it heralded my return home; he thought he could not bear any change yet; but we all assured him that was a mistake, and that entire submission to authority was most becoming in his present circumstances. Pleasant lodgings were accordingly taken for

him at a sea-coast village about six miles from Kingston, and thither he and Hannah removed on the same day that I went back to Eversley. The last evening we had a long talk together, substantially on the same theme as had engaged us so often before.

"Kathie, when you are gone now, I shall feel as if you had belonged to me and somebody had robbed me of you," he said, impatiently. "You have shed the essence of your presence all over the house. I recognize the touch of your fingers in all the decorations of this room; you filled that vase with fresh wild-flowers; you grouped those plants in the basket; you arranged the furniture so that, out of the poorest materials, a pleasant, home-like, cosy room is made for me."

"Well, Felix!"

"I knew who it was that haunted my room with such a pale face, and great, praying eyes; yes, Kathie, I always knew you. Your dress did not rustle or crackle like Hannah's, and your step was always as soft as the fall of a feather."

"Then I shall make a good sick-nurse, Felix?"

"Only to me. Your hand is cool, but it is not steady enough: I have felt it flutter many a time when you laid it on my burning forehead; but, for all that, your touch quieted me. Kathie, if I were mad I should like to have you near me; I should never harm you."

I bade him not talk of any thing so dismal, or I would go away; and presently Hannah coming to ask some question about my departure early the next morning, I bade him good-by, and, in better spirits than I had known for a long while now, went to my pillow. Little thought either of us then what changes there would be ere we should meet again.

LII.

The day after my return home my school reopened. This daily occupation of mine, from which we derived our subsistence, stands rather in the background of this story of my life. But it was, nevertheless, a very tedious task-work to me. Sometimes it fretted and chafed my spirits almost intolerably with its irksome monotony; the dreamy gilding had been long since rubbed off; it was toil—daily and unremitting—nothing else. There was now no time for reading or study; none for the idle luxury of thought: all the trivial details of our maintenance had, by degrees, fallen on me; I was kept down among small cares and small economies, and such duties are not, of themselves, improving or exalting.

Another solitary Christmas we kept in the west parlor; another spring came and went, but brought no change for us. Stephen was still in Penwitham's bank, receiving a large salary; but he made no advance toward assuming any portion of his pecuniary responsibilities—a result that I had reckoned on almost with certainty. My application that he would do so he met with a simple refusal; it was quite out of the question that he could do so in his circumstances, he said; and further assured me that the arrangement we had made for the ultimate payment of his debts was ridiculous: we might have been released from that burden long since but for my stupid folly in resolving that they should be paid to the uttermost farthing, if it took twenty years to do it. I did not think it necessary to tell my mother this, for I felt persuaded in my own mind that, whether our mode of settlement were usual or not, it was, at all events, the only honest course open to us. We were none of us versed in business affairs, and could only be guided by the common principles of right.

Isabel we had now not seen for two years, but Aunt Aurelia wrote us rhapsodies of her surpassing beauty. They

had passed the winter in Paris, and returned to London in May; Isabel was to be introduced that season, being nearly seventeen. I sighed sometimes to see how swiftly the years were flying, when the child Isabel was almost a woman, and little Jean prided herself on being half an inch taller than Kathie.

LIII.

Midsummer came round again, and my mother expressed an earnest wish to have Isabel at home for a few weeks; but Aunt Aurelia evaded the request, and my sister herself did not seem very anxious for the visit. Her letters to us were frequent, for the child had a good heart; but they were always filled with details of her gayeties and enjoyments—details that presented a forcible contrast to the state of things with us.

"It seems as if she did not belong to us," my mother said, sorrowfully—"as if she never could belong to us any more, Kathie."

From time to time both my aunt's and Isabel's letters had made mention of Mr. Reginald Pompe: he was a great prize in the "lottery of marriage," being illumined with a golden halo of several thousands a year which he had inherited from an eccentric relative. When at Crofton I had conceived a strong prejudice against this young man, less from his vanity and arrogance than from the signs of a cruel, harsh, violent temper which he manifested both by word and action. Hannah used to call him an "ill slip," and Miss Bootle always ushered Charlie out of the drawing-room at the Grange when he walked into it. He delighted in tormenting animals and children. If you saw him walk down the village, his riding-whip was always ready for a cut at any unlucky cur or urchin's legs that did not contrive to slink fast enough out of his sight. When, therefore, my aunt asked if I remembered the noble and beautiful youth whom I had seen

at Crofton Rectory when I lived with my grandmother, I replied that I did so—very unfavorably. This brought another communication from my aunt to beg that I would not suffer my mind to be prejudiced by the recollection of any juvenile escapades, for she had reason to believe that Mr. Reginald Pompe was captivated by Isabel, for whom he would be a most excellent match; she further said that it would be very agreeable to my sister and herself if I would spend my holidays with them in town, when I should have opportunities of forming a more favorable judgment of Mr. Reginald Pompe. Though greatly averse to such a journey at that time, my mother persuaded me to take it; that, if possible, Isabel's happiness might not be sacrificed for the sake of a showy connection. We had yet to learn how the child's own affections were disposed toward him, for we had not considered it advisable to broach the subject to her by letter, knowing as we did that if her feelings were thwarted she might turn perversely obstinate, and go contrary to all reasonable advice.

LIV.

It was during this journey that I encountered my Crofton friend, Mr. Longstaff. When I got into the coach there was a gentleman sitting by the door who was sheltered behind a great brown book which he was intently reading. The guard had just wound his horn for the first time, when there came panting out of the office a stout, respectable woman, with an infant in her arms.

"Here, mon, tak' th' wean!" said she to the student in a very Scotch accent.

"I dinna like weans," responded he, mimicking her voice, and lifting his hands above his head with a gesture of comical repugnance.

"Then it's time you larnt, mon," rejoined the mother; and she unceremoniously dropped the little shawled bundle

on his knees, hoisted herself up into the vehicle, seated herself opposite to him, and resumed the baby.

I had recognized my old acquaintance the moment his hands went up in the air; and when his stony self-possession returned, he looked coldly at the female who had injured him, and then glanced toward me.

"Ah, Miss Kathie, this is an unexpected pleasure," he cried, relaxing his grim features, and shaking hands cordially; "I did not observe your entrance into this public conveyance."

The Scotch dame muttered something about his being as "blind as a howlet and as unceevil as a bear;" compliments which fell on a deaf ear, but which were certainly not undeserved by a man who could tell a mother he did not like weans.

Mr. Longstaff informed me that he was going into Sussex for the purpose of studying its geological characteristics, with a view to settling there: his sister Theodosia was tired of Crofton, and he himself found the winters cold; but he should not like to live in a district whose component parts were so modern as Adam's world. He had some specimens of the encrinite in his pockets, and under the seat several largish slabs of coal with the impressions of ferns in them, and on these he discoursed to me eloquently for the space of two hours, to the great discomposure of the mother, whose wide-eyed baby would listen instead of going to sleep. The child wanted the stones to play with; and when the geologist made himself hard, and the little thing began to yell for disappointment, the mother looked triumphant. But Mr. Longstaff supported the din as if he were a fossil, and merely fenced off the objectionable *wean* with the brown book, and resumed his reading.

When the tempest lulled he gave me some particulars of Crofton and its changes. He supposed that I knew Mr. Mayne was gone back to his native place, Kingston. Miss

Conolly also had left the village. Mr. Martin's little daughter Rosetta, whom I remembered a child in frilled trowsers and spencer, was a married lady, and lived in the Grange—my grandmother's house. The doctor was growing infirm himself, but he had a son to assist him in his practice. Miss Palmer had established a boarding-school at Miss Conolly's house, but was not getting forward as well as she had hoped. Dr. Pompe, the rector, had been made a dean, and his daughter Milicent was supposed to be on the verge of entering a Protestant community of Sisters of Mercy. I was surprised to hear all this gossip from Mr. Longstaff; but I laid it to the account of his confirmed bachelorhood, bachelors being as inveterate gossips as old maids. We traveled to London in company; and having received Aunt Aurelia's address, he said he should do himself the honor of calling upon her before his return to the North.

LV.

My aunt's house was in Curzon Street. I arrived there two hours later than I expected to do, and found that they had given me over for that day, and were dressing for an evening party. Isabel would gladly have staid at home with me, but Aunt Aurelia objected; neither did I desire to deprive her of what she said would be one of the pleasantest gatherings of the season. So she took me up to her room, and made me rest on the couch while she went on with her dressing.

But first we had a talk: there were a hundred questions to ask and answer about those at home, and rapid sketches to be given and received concerning the events of the last two years. From a pretty child, Isabel had developed into a beautiful girl: any thing purer, brighter, lovelier than she was then, my eyes never saw. Aunt Aurelia had not exaggerated her exquisite grace. I could scarcely satisfy myself with watching her soft, gentle movements. "Oh, Isabel! I wish our mother could see you!" I cried.

"Poor mother! You don't know, Kathie, how like to her you are growing: you have just the same grave brow and solemn eyes. And oh, Kathie, I vow there is a white hair in your head!" and she took my face in her hands and kissed me.

I can not tell what there was in the touch of her warm, ripe lips that brought the tears in a rush to my eyes. For a minute or two I could not speak, and hid my face among the cushions of the couch. Isabel kept her hand caressingly on mine, saying a word now and then to soothe me. When I looked up at last her lashes were glittering too.

"Come, Kathie, let us be good," said she, smiling: "I wish I might have staid with you to-night, but Aunt Aurelia is imperative—"

"Never mind, Isabel; I want sleep to refresh me," replied I, cheerfully. "It is a long journey from Eversley, and to-morrow I shall have forgotten this weakness when I am rested."

There was a knock at the door. Isabel opened it, and to my astonishment Milicent Pompe entered.

"Are you ready?" asked she: then advanced into the room and shook hands, remarking that really she should not have known me but that she had been told I was coming, and so it could be nobody else. "Why, Kathie, you look fifty! I am sure you work too hard; does she not, Isabel?"

They stood side by side whispering for a minute or two, which gave me an opportunity of seeing how time had treated my former rival. Much more kindly than he had treated me: she was still a very handsome woman; her ringlets were as long and glossy as ever; her complexion as brilliant, though less delicate; and her air as light and lively—not much in accordance with my idea of a Sister of Mercy. Her dress was a rich maize-colored satin trimmed with black lace, and her hair was dressed with flowers of the same tint, mixed with gold leaves, which looked like a paler shade of her

bronzed ringlets. Isabel wore a simple white dress, with blush roses among the dark folds of her hair. I thought she was like a tall, pure lily, and Milicent a gorgeous tropical plant radiating the glow of summer noon.

"Reginald is waiting in the drawing-room, looking at his watch every minute, until you show him the light of your countenance," said Miss Pompe. "Kathie, order your sister to come away with me immediately: Mrs. Marston is ready, and it is past ten o'clock."

"It seems unkind to leave you, but I suppose I must, Kathie. Good-night!" She kissed me twice or thrice, and the maid entering to urge her to hasten, she ran off crying "I will have you all to myself to-morrow. Good-night, and pleasant dreams to you, Kathie!"

A room next to my sister's had been prepared for me; and, having had some tea, I went weary to bed. I was awakened out of my first sleep by Isabel's return home toward two o'clock. She came in to me in her white wrapper, with her long hair all hanging down; and saying she was just in the mood for a chat, set down her candle, pulled up an easy-chair, and threw herself into it by the bed. I was glad enough to indulge her, for I was really anxious to learn how matters stood between her and Reginald Pompe. She started the subject herself by saying that Milicent was coming to stay in the house for a few days, and she was sorry, as she would rather not have had her while I was there.

"I must tell you that Reginald and I are engaged, Kathie," whispered she, laying her warm lips on my cheek. "Don't look sad or sorry: it is for my happiness; indeed it is."

Why should she think I had reason to be either? Did she know what I knew of his character, I wondered.

"Let me kiss this solemn, foreboding smile away; you will see I shall be happy as the day is long—happy as a queen," cried she, blushing beautifully. She had made her election, so it was neither advisable nor justifiable to trouble

her with doubts of mine; and I encouraged her to open her heart to me without restraint.

"People tell me he is not perfection; but what of that?" she said, gayly; "perfection terrifies me! Milly says he is passionate and stern, but he is not so to me; he loves me too well ever to be harsh to me. And besides, Kathie, his coldness would be sweeter to me than any other man's devotion. I like him as he is—faulty, quick, warm, generous, oh! a thousand times better than those icy, methodical souls who are all precision and propriety—who never say or do any thing that censure can seize hold of. Don't think me foolish and headstrong, Kathie, don't! It would break my heart to part from him now, and be it fair or be it foul, I am proud and happy to accept my fate, whatever Reginald makes it." She had slid down on her knees while making this confession; and now, with her winning eyes looking archly into mine, bade me say that she was wise.

"You will have your share of happiness, Isabel, because it will come out of your own heart," I said.

"And is that all Kathie has to say to me?" she asked, wistfully: "nothing in the way of encouragement or congratulation?"

"Oh, Isabel! I pray you may be happy," I cried, clasping her close in my arms. "I pray you may be happy."

"I remember that Jean and I used to say you had the gift of second-sight, Kathie; come, prophesy something good for me: I have faith."

"Nay, I am as blind as others, Isabel; I do not see either your future or my own, and I do not wish to see them; surely the day's cares are enough for us."

I spoke thus because, so far as calculation and presentiment could go, I doubted her chance of happiness very much indeed.

"It is scarcely kind of you, Kathie; I trust your opinion so much: you don't know Reginald. Well, you shall see him to-morrow."

She got up and walked away as if offended or grieved, then came back. "Oh, Kathie, I am impatient and willful, but remember how I used to sympathize with you," she said, rapidly. "I hoped you would cheer me and give me hope, but instead you make me half afraid."

"Afraid of what, Isabel? I can not understand that you should fear what you love; what do you mean?"

She stood beside me a few seconds in silence; her eyes were glittering, and her lip compressed under her teeth, to stay its quivering. "But I do love and I do fear him; I dare not thwart him in the smallest thing," she replied, hesitatingly. "I have promised that we shall be married in September, and I want to go to Eversley, and see my mother first—indeed I should like to be married from our home: it would be right, and it ought to be."

"Certainly; my mother will be hurt if you are not. Why should there be any objection?"

"Kathie, you know we are so poor; and though Reginald is very kind, I do believe he is a little ashamed—that is not quite what I mean, he would rather his friends did not know about it—that you keep a little school; and he says it would all come out if he went down to Eversley. You understand me, Kathie; it is not my fault, and you must try to put it in a kinder light to poor mother."

"Oh yes, Isabel, I understand perfectly; it is quite what I expected from Reginald Pompe. But do go back with me for a week or two—Jean will think it unkind if you do not; and as for my mother, she would be cut to the heart: it would be very neglectful, when she desires it so much."

"But, Kathie, Reginald said absolutely that he did not wish it. What can I do? Aunt Aurelia thinks it is foolish to be set on it."

"Aunt Aurelia is not your mother: you have a duty to her certainly, but to us first. You must manage it some way: he will yield if you try him; and if he will *not*—"

"Well, Kathie, what if he will not?"

"He must be very hard and selfish; and if I were you, I should have my own way, at any rate, so long as I was free."

Isabel laughed merrily.

"Kathie, one might fancy that little heart of yours had always kept slow time; yet Aunt Aurelia says—and have not I myself seen?—your eyes shine and your face flush at the very name of Felix Mayne. What is there that he could ask that you would not long to do?"

"It is always hard to say him nay; but I have done it, Isabel. Yours is a fair cause of revolt, and I encourage you to rebel against unlawful authority."

"I'll think about it. I feel brave enough now, Kathie, but all my courage flies when he bends his brow. And yet I love him!" She stood a minute or so resting her chin on her pretty hand, and repeating the last words over as if the sound of them charmed her. Then she went slowly away to her room without looking at me or speaking any more.

LVI.

The next morning, being up long before any body else was stirring, and the morning being delightfully fresh and warm, I put on my bonnet, and, under the direction of a housemaid, whom I passed in the hall, found my way to one of the public parks. "The world" was not abroad yet, but there were a few individuals sunning themselves in the broad walks; individuals who, I felt, were for the time on the down side of Fortune's wheel—perhaps, who had been under it, and had come up crushed and maimed with many a stain of struggle upon them; men with hungry eyes and hollow cheeks, for whom the battle of life had been one long scene of rally and defeat, but who still kept the ensign of hope fluttering in the wind in the shape of the decent appearance they strove to put on their privations. Many an aspiring youth come to an untimely end in a haggard, disappointed manhood; many

a proud, respected manhood quenched in premature, ruined old age, were there. Artist, author, broken merchant, pupilless teacher, perhaps, but all telling the same tale by their loitering step and threadbare garments: "The world has not gone well with us."

It never fell to my lot to remain long in any great city; but what a study to observers who really *observe* must those London streets be.

Perhaps tragedy sweeps by in rich raiment, while comedy, wearing a doleful mask to move tender hearts, trips it on nature's primitive sole; wealth brushes us with a thrifty sleeve, and waste ambles after, clad in gorgeous array; striving, decent poverty creeps uncomplainingly by the wall, and loud, brazen poverty thrusts its sturdy, menacing fist in the face of society.

I wonder whether the world is very unequally dealt: happiness is not, perhaps, after all, a legitimate object of pursuit; but we like the excitement of the chase, and must have game in view. Yet, behold! after we have gone after it thirty, forty, fifty years, what a miserable little fox most people catch! Who has not found his castle in the air, if ever he came to dwell in it, a grand architectural mistake? —gusty, smoky, too big or too little, out of the reach of friends and acquaintance, or too near them—generally inconvenient, in short; and yet, perhaps, he has spent all his days in laboriously building it up, stone by stone, and after he has taken possession, he hates it worse than a prison.

As in a crowd of fifty thousand faces you find not two alike, so in the hearts of men the aspect of this universally desired happiness differs as much as their features do. To one, idleness and luxury, ease of body and torpor of mind; to another, hard work, mental and physical; to a third, the laying of house to house, and land to land, and the shutting up of mountains of money in banks where it is of about as much use to its possessor as if it had never been dug out of its na-

tive mine—these are three phases of that happiness which might be multiplied *ad infinitum*. Perhaps the commonest is to covet a higher station, though it is pretty generally allowed that happiness lies not in the multitude of things that men have. I myself never saw the rich or the great whose position did not make me more contented with my own—more thankful for the will and power to work independently, and for the distinct line in which my duties lay. My lot had the common cares and common griefs of our nature in abundance, but it lay wide of either dangerous extreme—riches and poverty.

Each in her own way, Isabel and I were intent on bringing happiness home to ourselves; yet I could see distinctly that where my sister was garnering up the precious grain of hope would be a black mildew of sorrow and disappointment. I could *see*, but not *avert* it.

She was dressed when I returned home, and met me with the warmest welcome.

"Now I feel sure I have you, Kathie," cried she. "When I looked into your room this morning and found you flown, I was afraid it was only a dream that I had had last night."

We breakfasted together, Aunt Aurelia not being up, and then Isabel made me go into the back drawing-room, where her harp and piano were.

"Now I am going to play to you, Kathie: I love music; it carries me away from myself into such a blissful dreamland."

So she began, and I sat quietly listening. Presently she sang some wild German airs; and then, seeing that I did not care much for them, said, "I know what you like, Kathie, and you shall have them, though they always make me melancholy. Whenever any thing recalls to me my home, I remember how willful I was about leaving you all, and am half afraid—but a truce to presentiments!"

And she began to sing one of those sweet old English bal-

lads which used to make the west parlor echo when she was a girl at home. They brought all that time very vividly back to my mind, and with its mingled memories a few hot tears. Isabel stopped playing when she saw them.

"Kathie, sisters though we are, how little we know of each other," said she: "these songs would not have touched you thus a year or two ago. Tell me something about yourself: why have you donned these gray gowns, which Aunt Aurelia calls the livery of spinsterhood? Why is your dear little face growing old before its time? You have had a very short spring, Kathie."

Short indeed; but I was not there to trouble her young thoughts with my weary ones, so I put the questions aside and spoke of Stephen.

"We see nothing of him now," said she, carelessly; "he is in a different set from ours: Aunt Aurelia keeps him quite at arm's length. You know, Kathie, any body may lead him: and from being reckless and wild, he has turned puritanical, and wants to lecture us all. We did not relish it from so faulty an apostle, and declined both his tracts and his advice; so he never comes near us. I have not seen him for a month."

This information certainly surprised me, and I asked more.

"You had better go and see him yourself, Kathie, and try to profit by his preaching. He vexed my aunt very much by saying that our poor mother is too anxious after the things of this world, and that her repeated disappointments on his account had been gracious dispensations to wean her from earthly hopes, and instruments of righteous correction. We thought it disgusting; and when we bade him say no more, he sent us a letter, setting forth his constancy under our persecution, and admonishing us to lose no more time before setting to work to save our souls. You will find him quite changed; whether for the better or not, I can not say: charitably we may hope so."

I asked who were his friends.

"They are all of the same stamp: they eschew innocent amusements, glorify themselves, and tremble for the rest of the world. I should say Stephen is a favorable specimen, from what I have seen, for he once induced me to go to his chapel, and introduced me to a family of people with whom he is very intimate. He wanted me to be acquainted with the daughter; but she was a commonplace, affected little damsel, and I declined more than distant civilities. I should have thought Stephen was paying his addresses to her if I had not known that he is engaged to Lilias Fenton."

This news made me uneasy; for I knew Stephen's fickleness in his attachments, and also I remembered how mortified he had been at hearing from Paul of his inability to give Lilias any fortune.

While we were still talking about Stephen, my aunt came in, looking very pretty in her morning dress and lace cap.

"My darling, Laure tells me you have ordered yourself to be denied to every body—is it so?" she inquired, laying her hand on Isabel's shoulder affectionately.

"Yes; it is Kathie's first day, and we have so much to talk about."

"Poor Kathie! you are looking rather worn, I think: you are scarcely recovered from the fatigue of your journey. But, Isabel, she need not care for seeing Mr. Pompe: he is sure to call after luncheon."

"What do you say, Kathie, shall he be let in?" asked my sister, blushing, and glancing shyly at me.

"Yes; I should like to know him better."

"Thanks; that is my good Kathie. Prepare to lose all your disagreeable old prejudices," whispered Isabel; then she turned back to the piano and dashed off a lively air.

Isabel's beauty was truly fascinating. No matter in what costume she was, or in what mood, I always fancied that then she looked the best. At this moment, in a loose muslin dress,

simply confined round the waist with a rose ribbon, her hair folded in glossy braids, her cheek flushed, and her eyes brightened with happy fancies, which found their expression in the wild tunes she was playing, her loveliness exceeded all I had ever seen or read of. Aunt Aurelia left us, and by-and-by, I think, Isabel forgot that I was there, for she began singing in a soft, low tone, as if to herself. She had passed into her dream-land, and was happy.

Mine, alas! I entered rarely now; it was no longer the charmed region of the unknown and ideal. Time, and experience, and tears had washed the glamour from my eyes, and forced me to see life shorn of its brightest glory. For a long half hour she continued to sing out of her full heart; then rising suddenly, she clasped me in her arms, crying, "Oh, you dear, patient Kathie! would you never have awoke me? I might have gone on crooning my pet tunes till dark, I verily believe, before you would have spoken."

There was a loud ringing at the door-bell. "Who is it—Regy?" added she; and with her finger on her lip she ran to the front windows and peeped out. "Yes. Kathie, promise to be amiable," supplicated she, gravely. "If you are ungracious to him I shall not think you kind to me."

Before I had time to reply the servant announced Mr. Pompe. He forestalled Isabel's reintroduction by at once claiming me as an old acquaintance, and reverting to the period when I had been at Crofton: it might have been thought that we were quite intimate friends, instead of which I do not think we had ever before exchanged a dozen sentences. I was willing to meet him half way; and it must be admitted that at this meeting he appeared much improved. He was, indeed, an extremely handsome person, very self-possessed, and, when it pleased him, cordial, and apparently frank in manner. Isabel had taken a seat by the centre window, and he stood with his back to it, the sun shining through his golden tawny hair. When I came to observe

his face, and the play of its expression as he talked to my sister, I detected the same arrogant and wily expression that used to displease me; but I tried to think the best of him for her sake who loved him.

LVII.

That evening I found my way alone to Stephen's lodgings, which were in a retired street a considerable distance from where my aunt lived. He was at home, but I had to wait a short time for his appearance, and beguiled the interval by examining his pictures. One small engraving of a female head, looking out from sombre clouds, with light glancing across the brow and eyes, occupied me when Stephen came in. It was entitled the "Morning Star."

"Kathie, who would have thought of seeing *you* in London?" cried he, noisily. "The next news will be that the Minster is taking a walk up Cornhill."

He did not appear very glad to see me; indeed, a certain coolness had existed between us for a long while, and both were conscious of it.

"So Isabel is going to be married?" said he. "You are a long time in getting off, Kathie; Mr. Mayne must be tired of waiting. When is it to be?"

"I can not say, Stephen," replied I, and then turned the conversation on himself, of which engaging person he was nothing loth to speak. I asked an explanation of what Isabel had told me of his change of religious opinions and of his new acquaintance.

"A man must amuse himself," replied he, coloring and laughing confusedly.

To so general a remark I had nothing to say, but almost unconsciously my eyes rested on the "Morning Star," and this set him off in full career almost faster than I could follow.

"Is it not pretty?" cried he, getting up from his chair and

standing before the picture. "Isn't it a sweet thing, and so like her, Kathie?"

"Like whom? Like Lilias? I don't see the resemblance."

"Lilias! No, not Lilias—Flora Brunton. By-the-by, you don't know her; it was Isabel I introduced her to."

My brother kept his face studiously averted, but I could tell by his tone that he was doubtful how this subject would be received.

"And who is Flora Brunton?" I inquired.

"Sister to one of Penwitham's clerks. I am sure you would like her, Kathie; she is a bit of genuine, unspoiled nature; not one of your highly-educated gentlewomen who are fined down until you can not tell one from another."

"Oh!" was my dismayed ejaculation.

"She has a nice little fortune of her own—four thousand pounds—and half Penwitham's fellows are wild about her. I am much to be envied, I can tell you;" and, as he jerked out the last sentence, Stephen turned nervously round and faced me.

"I thought greed and vanity were at the bottom of your enthusiasm," said I, plainly; "but how can you reconcile your acquaintance with Flora to your engagement to Lilias Fenton?"

He turned very red and looked angry. "You seem to think, Kathie, that nobody knows what is right but yourself. Lilias need never know. I am not going to behave badly to her: don't be afraid."

"I am glad to hear it; but, in that case, you are playing with this young Flora; she may be misinterpreting your attentions and learning to love you."

"I wish Lilias had Flowy's money, or that Flowy had Lilias's beauty," replied he, with unblushing audacity. "Lilias is a pearl, but Flowy is very taking too. I wish you knew her; you would just suit, for she would look up to you, and all that sort of thing. I have talked about you to her often."

"Well, Stephen, I must decline the acquaintance at present. Where do you spend your fortnight's holiday this summer?"

"I have not settled; perhaps I may run down to Eversley, to take a peep at Lilias and my mother: when do you go back?"

"Not for three weeks time. I shall be so glad if you will go with me; it would rejoice my mother greatly. She half hoped you would," said I.

"I'll think about it, and try to arrange. You see, the Bruntons have planned a trip to Paris, and I almost promised to be of the party. Flowy will be disappointed, but perhaps it would be better to get out of it?" He looked at me questioningly.

"Decidedly better," I responded.

He began to hum a tune, meantime looking rather sentimentally at the "Morning Star." "Poor little Flo', she'll almost break her heart!" said he, with a half smile.

"Break her heart! You must have behaved very cruelly and deceitfully then, Stephen," interposed I, gravely.

"Deceitful and desperately wicked I always was, Kathie, you know. But she is a witch for temper! I wonder what she'd do: storm and rave—yes, that would be it. I've seen her in some of her tantrums; she would fly out like a fury and say she hated me."

He paused for a minute or two, and then with a very serious air introduced the theme of his religious impressions. I listened with exemplary patience until he began to speak of the spiritual darkness of our home, and his mother's worldly-mindedness; then I said, "Stephen, if there is one thing more than another that I hate and abominate, it is cant and hypocrisy; the less you depreciate our mother the better: you have for years been our greatest anxiety and care, and I do not think you yet qualified to teach or to preach."

He broke into a loud laugh that jarred unpleasantly on

my feelings. "Kathie, you are a regular little shrew!" cried he; "I thought you would like to hear of my reformation."

"I want to see the signs of it, Stephen: I do not like the piety that consists exclusively in finding motes in our neighbors' eyes."

"Ah! I know where you are. You are seeking to be saved by works, Kathie, and it is a deadly mistake."

"I am going away now, Stephen; will you walk with me as far as my aunt's house?"

No, he could not—he had an engagement; so we separated rather coldly, and I went home alone.

LVIII.

My brief experience of the delights of polite society must needs find a place in this chronicle of my uneventful life, for it served us to talk about in the west parlor for long after. I did not much enjoy my visit to London, being too far removed in mode of life and turn of thought to take real pleasure in those amusements which formed the sum and substance of my aunt Aurelia's existence. Once a fortnight there were miscellaneous gatherings in her drawing-rooms which gave me a glimpse of that great world in which she, an inferior satellite, revolved. There was always a grand crush on the staircase, and the rooms were overcrowded and overheated, so that, at the best, those who came made a toil of a pleasure. It was ludicrous to see stout satin dowagers looking, some laboriously at ease, others crushed and cross, with slender tulle daughters on their arms, making their way with unconscious foot and elbow through the press. I must confess that the polite scuffle used sometimes to make me smile. This, I suppose, was that aspect of happines yclept Pleasure.

At one of these meetings I was reintroduced to Mrs. Pompe, who was attired, as became a dean's lady and the summer season, in ruby velvet and plumed turban. She had to raise her glass before she recognized me, and then graciously pat-

ronized me with two limp white kid fingers, which I did myself the honor of shaking. Mr. Longstaff was also present, looking very stiff and solemn against the chimney-piece; and Miss Conolly, more elaborately juvenile than ever, claimed my acquaintance. With her I had conversation.

"My dear Miss Kathie, I am delighted to see you: it really reminds me of old times," said she, gayly, as if we had been contemporaries. "I presume you have come up to town to be present at your sister's marriage? Ah! what a sweet, lovely young creature she is; so different from Milicent Pompe!" Here the elderly maiden dropped her voice, and spoke in a confidential whisper. "She will never get off—never! She might sing that innocent little air that used to be a favorite of hers ten years ago, 'Nobody coming to marry me, nobody coming to woo!' But since people have begun to observe its lively personal application, she has dropped it in public, though, I dare say, she sighs over it often in private."

Miss Conolly's scandal had lost all its subtle, delicate aroma. She demolished a reputation with a sort of rude, elephantine tramp now, and her acrid spite betrayed itself in the hard, sneering lines about her wrinkled mouth.

"Look at Milicent Pompe!" said she, directing my attention to where she stood, the centre of a group of gentlemen. "Is she not faded? And what an expanse of shoulder! She has been to Harrowgate to improve her complexion, and it has not answered. She has been more hawked about than any respectable girl in London, my dear. It is fourteen years since she came out—it is, indeed; and she may be on the *tapis* fourteen years longer, it is my belief, before any body will marry her. She begins to find her beauty on the wane, and a little while since she retrograded into a sort of chrysalis-pious state. There was actually a report that she was going to retire into a convent; but, as that did not create a sensation, and nobody came forward to rescue her from

such a fate, she astounded us by assuming the *rôle* of wit and original. The manœuvres of these fashionable women are legion. Positively, Milicent Pompe wears leather boots and a poke bonnet in the mornings, and goes about the streets investigating the condition of the poor, and giving away money and advice when she is at home. It is her good point that she is generous; let her have her due."

Mrs. Pompe, in deep conversation with Mr. Longstaff, passed near us. Miss Conolly shivered, and craned up her neck severely. "My dear, it gives me a sort of *creeping feel* to see a woman of Mrs. Pompe's age and position laying herself out to catch the admiration of single men. What a singularly course-featured person she is! Ah! if the poor, dear, confiding Dean knew! Well, well, we live in strange times; we shall see what we shall see. She reminds me of the figure-head of a French ship of war, '*La Jézèbel*,' that I once saw in Brest harbor."

Miss Conolly spoke with acrimonious vivacity; no doubt the two ladies had quarreled, and hated each other with genuine feminine spite. Mrs. Froude, a sharp-featured, hungry-eyed woman, the mother of three unmarried but eligible daughters, whose acquaintance I had made at Crofton, checked Miss Conolly's criticisms by claiming me with demonstrative eagerness. "Miss Brande, I ought to congratulate you on your beautiful sister's great match," said she, with an affectionate or affected frankness; "but you know me: I am a person who speaks her mind, and sincerely, my dear, I can not use the usual complimentary phrases on this occasion."

She sat down beside me, and cast up her eyes pensively. It is a weakness of mine to shrink from an individual who prefaces a conversation with the information that he or she is candid, and will speak his or her mind; I know beforehand that something ill-natured is coming. But escape now was impossible, edged in as I was; and, besides, in her ar-

dor, Mrs. Froude had taken my hand, and did not relinquish it until she had said her say.

"Mrs. Marston is the person to be blamed for encouraging the attachment," whispered she, lugubriously; "she knows the sort of life Mr. Pompe has led, and the character he bears. Even his best friends say he has the very—well—*a* temper! I must tell you, my dear: about a year ago he was much struck with my innocent little Emmy; but she used to cry when he was mentioned, and say, 'No, mamma, no: I would rather marry a porcupine! He is always bristling up his quills!' Dear Emmy is *so* witty and lively."

"It is a remarkable fact that Mr. Reginald Pompe's engagement to Isabel Brande should have brought his manifold iniquities to light," remarked Miss Conolly, sarcastically; "we never heard of them until he ceased to be an object of competition."

Mrs. Froude vouchsafed no reply to this innuendo. "It is sad that so fair and good a young creature should be sacrificed to such a man," said she, pitifully; "my heart aches for her. Ah! Miss Brande, is it impossible to detach her from him even now?"

"Quite impossible, Mrs. Froude," interjected Miss Conolly, with glee; "all the arrangements are made, and the settlements are being prepared."

I could not contradict it. Mrs. Froude groaned, and the spinster lady said she was sure it was a disappointment.

"There is quite a mercantile spirit prevailing among worldly people regarding matrimonial alliances in our day," observed Mrs. Froude, pathetically. "Not that I mean to suggest that either Mrs. Marston or your sister has been actuated by so miserably mean a motive as Mr. Pompe's six thousand a year; far be it from me to insinuate such a suspicion. But *my* dear children should never be made articles of barter—never!"

"Oh! Mrs. Froude, I am glad to hear *you* say so," said

Miss Conolly, derisively, "for I have always thought that if Satan himself were to visit the shades of Almack's, his horns invested with strawberry leaves, and calling himself Duke of Viledurance, there would be found mothers willing to give him their youngest and fairest to wife, and daughters eager to accept the position."

"Oh, shocking! monstrous!" murmured Mrs. Froude; "such persons must be quite lost to a sense of propriety." And with a mildly keen glance round the room she left me, and wound her way through the crush into the back drawing-room, where her innocent Emmy was flirting with a little ensign of eighteen, to the young gentleman's great danger and confusion.

"Now, my dear, I will just tell you how it is that Mrs. Froude is so intensely spiteful about Reginald Pompe," said Miss Conolly, in her confidential whisper: "not that I wish to contradict what she says about his badness; but the fact is, she has thrown her daughters at his head, one after the other, in the most barefaced way, and now every body are diverting themselves with the sight of her mortification and failure. First she tried him with Sibyl, who is the beauty of the family; then the innocent Emmy had her chance; and lastly Kitty, the lively and hoydenish, sought to captivate him. It was aggravating that the three varieties should fail, certainly; but it is very bad policy in Mrs. Froude to go about exposing the girls' stratagems by abusing the Pompes to every body who will listen to her. But she is a queer woman—a very queer woman. It is generally supposed that she sleeps with one eye open, ready to take advantage of every opening in the matrimonial market; and some very wild speculations her energetic spirit has led her into. Really, my dear, the history of her blunders might lay the foundation for a new Comedy of Errors."

While Miss Conolly was thus holding forth on the faults and foibles of her friends, Aunt Aurelia passed us on the arm

of a tall, dark-faced military man, with grizzled hair and an immense mustache. Mr. Longstaff followed them into the small boudoir which opened from the front drawing-room, and there the three held a long conversation.

"Who can he be?" Miss Conolly said, half to herself. "I feel sure I have seen his face before; my dear, do you know who that is talking to Mrs. Marston?"

I replied that nearly all the people present were strangers to me, but that I thought the gray officer had a look of Mr. Longstaff.

"You are right: it is Wilfred Longstaff! it is the colonel! How cheerful your aunt looks; my dear, I should never be surprised if those two were to marry even now."

I asked an explanation.

"Wilfred Longstaff was your aunt Aurelia's first love; I quite well remember the time they were separated, and he went to India. To think that they should meet and be on such excellent terms! But it is very well known that she was not happy in her marriage. I must go and speak to the colonel; dear me, I remember giving him sugar-plums when he was a little boy!" and Miss Conolly, for once free from spleen and spite, meandered into the boudoir and claimed her ancient friend. He seemed to receive her very graciously; and when she returned to her seat by me, I observed that she did not speak another ill-natured word all the evening.

My aunt's face was quite changed as she talked to the rather grim-looking colonel: its expression of lassitude and discontent had vanished, her pretty eyes shone pleasantly, and her color was a little raised by the excitement of the meeting, perhaps. I had never seen her look so well. She did not make that common mistake of dressing to look younger than she was; she could not seem a girl in her fresh spring, but she was altogether the gentle, graceful, and gracious woman of summer age. The colonel twirled his long gray mustache, and eyed her admiringly: it was easy to see that

he was as much in love with her as ever. I was very glad when my aunt sent Mr. Longstaff for me and introduced us: I liked his face, and I liked, too, that my aunt Aurelia should look so happy, and that for once a long fidelity should come before my eyes, and be acknowledged and rewarded.

The elder Longstaff, my geological friend, looked half bewildered, but very benign. He talked to himself, a little to my amusement. "Theodosia will be delighted; I should not wonder if she consented to stay at Crofton. It will give her something to think about and arrange. Dear Tedo! I must carry the news to her to-morrow, and Wilfred may follow me down," said he, in an under tone. Then suddenly catching my eye, he added, "Miss Kathie, can I carry any message for you to your grandmamma?" He stopped, turned a dull red, and stammered an apology. "Ten thousand pardons! it was quite inadvertent, I assure you—quite inadvertent. My brother Wilfred's unexpected arrival has driven nearly every thing else from my memory." He rubbed up his obstinate hair and stood very erect, as if trying to collect his stray faculties; but from moment to moment a smile expanded his grim features, as if his satisfaction were too lively for suppression.

"He is my youngest brother, Miss Kathie," said he, in an explanatory tone. "When he went away to India he was a smooth-faced, slim young fellow, and look at him now. Theodosia will say he looks older than I do, but it is the climate that has done it; yes, the climate—nothing else."

The old soldier—he looked old, though he was considerably under fifty—was leaning over the sofa on which Aunt Aurelia sat, whispering to her, and she was blushing like a girl.

"Ah!" said Mr. Longstaff, "he might have come home ten years ago. All would have been right; we told him so; but Wilfred always had a spice of obstinacy in his character, and would not believe us. I wonder what Tedo will say."

He was talking to himself again, so I took advantage of his abstraction to slip away to Isabel, and communicate the intelligence, for she was watching my aunt and Colonel Longstaff very curiously.

"I know all about it," said she, as I came up. "Miss Conolly has been overflowing to Milicent and me for the last ten minutes, and now she has gone off to enlighten Mrs. Froude. Look at that lady's round-eyed astonishment!"

The rooms were now comparatively empty; party after party went away, until only the Pompes and Longstaffs remained. Mr. Reginald was in a very gloomy mood; something had evidently offended him.

"Regy looks stormy—what has happened?" Milicent whispered to me. I could not tell. "It is lucky for Isabel that she loves him as she does," she added, "for there is every probability of her being well tried with him. She has had warning enough, so it is with her eyes open that she walks into the snare. I may say it to you, Kathie Brande, because you know him; but he can be very hard and selfish; encourage your sister to hold her own will, at any rate, till they are married. We all see that she fears as much as she loves him, and my anticipation is that the love will evaporate by-and-by, and leave only the fear behind."

"I hope she will be happy: all these warnings come too late; matters must take their course now," I replied, quietly.

"Very true. For my part, I consider it an immense risk to marry any body. Only think of sitting opposite the same face at breakfast three hundred and sixty-five times a year. Positively, one had need start with a large stock of love and esteem, for it must be awfully monotonous."

Mrs. Pompe admonished her daughter that it was time to go.

"I am coming with my trunks to-morrow," said Milicent; "then you and I can have some long chats: I am an inveterate gossip. Oh! Regy is making it up with Isabel. I

wonder what they quarreled about. The Longstaffs are going too. Isn't it delightful to see any body look so happy as Mrs. Marston does? Good-night!"

My aunt disappeared with the last guests; and thinking she might not care to see us again just then, Isabel and I went up to our rooms.

"Oh, how tired I am!" cried my sister, throwing herself upon the couch with an air of weariness and vexation. I asked what ailed her.

"I can not go to Eversley, Kathie," replied she. "Reginald will not hear of it, and I promised not to tease any more about it. You must explain it to my mother, and don't let her think hardly of me. I am disappointed, but there is reason in what he says—"

"What does he say: I should like to know what reason there is in denying you the sight of your mother?"

"Well, Kathie, we can not expect him to understand our old-fashioned ways of thinking. It does not grieve *him* not to see his family: the Pompes don't seem to care for each other. He abuses Milicent, and Milicent abuses him."

"It is two years since my mother saw you, Isabel."

"Yes, I know it is. But I have a plan: I will come after I am married, before we go abroad—quietly for a day or two. I will tell you what he says, Kathie, and it is sensible enough. You are at home in very poor circumstances, and people might expect him to do something for Stephen and set you free; but he has made up his mind not to be burdened with poor relations, and he wishes, therefore, to keep clear of my family. He would never let me introduce Stephen to him, and can you wonder at it?"

For a minute or two I said nothing: what Isabel now declared I had all along suspected to be the case; but it was disagreeable to hear it stated. "He need be under no apprehensions: we should never trouble him," I at length replied. "It is a mere excuse: oh, Isabel! I wish you had never seen him! I wish you had never seen him!"

"Somebody has been filling your ears with their poisonous slanders," cried she, her beautiful, willful face crimsoning with anger. "It is not kind in you to receive them as true. People have done their duty in warning me, without setting you against him. If he has been extravagant, what of that? Look at our own Stephen: at least, Reginald has not made his family suffer by his follies. I am sick of being told of his irregularities; and I hold no person my friend who persists in abusing him."

She turned away petulantly. I begged her not to be angry with me, and, putting my arm round her neck, drew her face to mine to kiss her.

"Isabel, you know I love you: I would suffer any thing for you if you could be saved from this marriage," I said, gently.

"You are talking nonsense, Kathie! Nobody knows better than you that we don't suffer by proxy in these cases," replied she, with bitterness.

"I must speak, sister—I must, though you should hate me for it. Is he not unprincipled, passionate, cruel, jealous, as people say? Oh, Isabel, go home with me: I know this marriage will work nothing but misery for you."

"Is that all? Have you said enough, Kathie?" exclaimed she, rising up proudly and pushing me away; "are there any more wicked, injurious things you would like to repeat to me? I tell you once for all, I would willingly die for Reginald: there is not a creature in the world I value in comparison with him—not one. Now go away: I want to be alone."

She stood up a few paces from me with her hand extended to repulse me, her cheek blazing, and her eyes full of a dark fire. It was useless then to strive with her resentment, and I crept away as she bade me, weeping, to my chamber.

LIX.

The next morning she came to me early: she had been crying too, and her eyes were red. "Kathie," she began, laying her hand on my neck, "Kathie, don't talk to me about Reginald any more in your cold, icy way; it tortures me; I can not bear it. I want to love you, and I want you always to love me; but it can not be if you talk against Reginald. I will not hear him aspersed, and be silent. I can not be patient even with you, though I know you are right to speak out. You mean it for the best, Kathie, but it is of no avail. I am proud of my bondage; I am a contented slave. What is the use of pointing to liberty when I like my captivity better? Ah! Kathie, there is a very loud-beating heart under your gray gown that ought, from its own experience, to know better than to try to make me turn traitress to my love." She kissed me, and thus ended our last dispute on the subject of her marriage.

During the morning, Milicent Pompe came with all her baggage, as she said, for a week's stay at my aunt's house. The Dean and his wife were gone to Cheltenham, whither she was to follow them when her visit was at an end. When she learned that Isabel had given up her intention of going to Eversley, she took her to task much more severely than I had ventured to do.

"You little foolish child! I thought you had twice as much character; why Reginald can knead you like clay into any mould he pleases," cried she. "What do you mean by letting him have his own absurd way? you scarcely dare say your soul is your own."

Isabel pouted, and bade Milicent be still: "No; I have got a little story to tell you, and I hope it may be a warning to you," continued the young lady. "Yesterday I went with mamma to call on the St. Barbes. You know Mrs. St. Barbe—a fair, delicate woman, who always dresses in blue?

Well, while we were talking, her lawful spouse came in, arrayed from head to foot in white calico, with a red scarf of his wife's tied round his waist, and a fez cap on his head. He has recently grown an immense black, brushy beard: it nearly comes up to his eyes; and he squints over it in the most fiendish manner. Now, six months ago, his innocent little wife unfortunately made a remark to the effect that she disliked beards and clarionet-players. He immediately purchased four clarionets, and ever since has practiced on each of them daily in her drawing-room for three hours. The beard was not to be had at a moment's notice, but he has spent a little fortune on the fertilizing unguents which are advertised in the papers for the purpose of bringing it to perfection. There are persons who say that he does not squint by nature, but has just taken up the trick to aggravate Mrs. St. Barbe. And Reginald is quite capable of learning to squint and blow the clarionet to vex you, Isabel, if you encourage him in his Turkish ways."

My sister laughed, and said she thought monstrosities were ground enough to sue for a divorce.

"But divorces are expensive luxuries; much better try the effect of a little timely rebellion. Pack up your box and run away to Eversley with Kathie. Reginald will not be half so tyrannical after you have shown your independence."

I advised the same; but Isabel shook her head.

"No, no, no, I will not hear you," she cried, stopping her ears.

"I am afraid you have only half a grain of proper spirit," returned Milicent; "but willful woman will have her way."

My aunt came in, and took Isabel away for one of those consultations which were now frequent; making bride's clothes was again going forward.

Milicent asked me, when they were gone, if there had been any announcement yet about Colonel Longstaff: there had not.

"We all think that they will be quietly married immediately Isabel leaves your aunt," said she. "The colonel has been in town a month, but they had not met till last night; and when he came here with a friend, he did not actually know that Mrs. Marston was his old love. I remember him quite well when I was a little girl: he was an extremely handsome person, and very much attached to your aunt. She was always pretty. I like to see people made happy, and that is a marriage it will give me pleasure to witness. There is quite an old-fashioned devotion in Colonel Longstaff's manner to your aunt. I wish Regy treated Isabel with half as much tenderness."

I expressed some surprise that my sister should be so blindly attached to Reginald as to give up her own will to him as she did.

"I wondered too, at first, but now I understand it perfectly," replied Milicent. "She is headstrong and willful: a timid lover she would have trifled with, tortured, and rejected; but to Regy's impetuosity she succumbed at once. She had met her master, and acknowledged him. If he were as faithful as he is fond, and as tender as he is jealous, she would be a happy woman; but I greatly fear her experiences will have partaken of the bitter waters of strife before she has been his wife a year and a day. She will not like the curb always, poor Isabel! but she has a high spirit of her own when it does break out, and perhaps it may keep him a little in check."

LX.

My aunt Aurelia occasionally gave musical parties to a select number of her friends, and one of these took place while I was in town. Colonel Longstaff came, the Pompes, the Froudes, and several other people, useful as singers or listeners. Among the latter I saw Miss Wilton, whom I had known at Crofton. She looked a shade more eccentric than

formerly, but was still talkative and good-humored. She said she had understood that I was engaged to Mr. Mayne; and, from that text, expatiated diffusely on his genius, pronouncing herself one of his warmest admirers.

Milicent Pompe joined in her praises so gracefully as to show that long since all pique on her own account had been forgotten. She wore her most benevolent expression, which, Miss Wilton bid me observe, indicated that she was on evil thoughts intent. When she left us she glided to that part of the room where the harp and piano were.

My aunt always tried to obtain for her parties somebody new and attractive. This evening it was a Mr. Candish—a stately, handsome person, and an eldest son in possession of a fabulous fortune. Rumor said that he had turned eyes of favor on Milicent Pompe and Sibyl Froude, between whom an unexpressed, but deadly rivalry had in consequence arisen.

The group was elegantly posed. Sibyl, soft, white, and downy as a puff-ball, leaned over the harp with picturesque grace; her slender, rose-tipped fingers, rounded arm, dimpled elbow, and full, marble shoulder, called not in vain for admiration; while her animated, confiding countenance, slightly turned toward Mr. Candish, beamed with tender and warm feeling. Mr. Candish stood by the chimney-piece, with his fine, weary, chestnut head thrown back, and his half-closed eyes emitting that melancholy, treacherous glance, subtilely dangerous to some women as the serpent-ray in Eden was to Eve. He admired Sibyl: every envious dowager in the room saw it; Milicent Pompe saw it, and was glad; for Sibyl and she had dissembled rage in their hearts, and a sweet revenge was preparing. This Mephistophelian friend stood behind the singer clad in black lace, with carnations in her hair and bosom, and served as a foil to the fair and unsuspicious Sibyl. Her plans had been laid with cruel accuracy, so as to preclude all possibility of failure.

Sibyl Froude had a peculiarity—let us speak of it delicately, and call it a peculiarity—to some it might be a charm: when in repose, her brilliant, sea-gray eyes were clear and beautiful; but when she was thwarted or disturbed, they squinted. It was a nervous affection. The amiable Milicent knew this: which of her friend's vulnerable points knew she not, indeed? She was aware, also, that Sibyl objected to having her music looked over, lest any body should choose the same pieces, and make it common; and, therefore, with obtrusive rustle, while the victim was singing most pathetically the first verse of her song, she began to furl over the leaves, and murmur the names, as if learning them by heart.

Sibyl heard and saw, but it was impossible for her to check the obnoxious proceeding without breaking off.

Mr. Candish's penetrating gaze was on her face; first the beautiful color forsook her cheek, then a green flickering danced under her eyelids, and next her obliquity of glance became painfully distinct.

Mr. Candish straightened himself up out of his languid attitude, and stared at her like a basilisk. The transformation was something marvelous, and really most entertaining to initiated spectators of Milicent's faction.

As the song ended, Milicent closed the music-folio with emphasis, and said to her friend benignly, "I am afraid you are not well, dear?"

The words were meant for the censorious, for people in general, but the smile that accompanied them was patent only to the initiated.

Being interpreted, it signified, "Mistress Sibyl, you impertinently laughed at and depreciated me, and I have punished you; you are so nervous and angry now that you will squint all the rest of the night, and Mr. Candish will never admire you again."

Sibyl looked downward with a touching shyness as she

left the harp, but Mr. Candish did not draw near to compliment her: he was stroking his mustache, and gazing meditatively at the ceiling.

Sibyl slid her hand forgivingly within the arm of her treacherous friend, and went into the inner drawing-room, whence she only reappeared to go away.

"For an indolently good-natured woman, Milicent Pompe can do most spiteful things," remarked Miss Wilton, who had taken a mischievous interest in this little by-play; "I should not care to excite her enmity. What a satisfied expression there is in her face! what triumph! Well, I hope Mr. Candish will not fall into her hands, for he deserves a better fate."

As neither Miss Wilton nor Mr. Candish ever crossed my path after this evening, and disappear henceforward from this history, I may as well state here that some ten years later they married, to every body's violent astonishment, and went to live at Florence, where their entertainments became very popular, both among English and foreign residents.

LXI.

During the week of Milicent Pompe's visit there was an incessant round of gayeties going on; Aunt Aurelia, Isabel, and she went out together, and I staid at home writing long letters to my mother and Felix, or sometimes talking to Stephen, who came when he knew I was alone. He did not give me the benefit of any more spiritual advice, neither did he again introduce the subject of Flora Brunton; he was, indeed, brimming with pleasure at the idea of going to Eversley and seeing Lilias. He actually talked about hastening his marriage, if Paul Fenton's consent could be obtained; "for you know, Kathie, I shall do much better when I am settled," said he.

Stephen always acted from impulse instead of principle; so, when the impulse was good, I was glad to encourage it, and did so now. I hoped, too, that his going home with me

might soften my mother's disappointment about Isabel; for after all was said and done to obtain a reversal of Mr. Pompe's decree, I was obliged to return to Eversley without her.

Our parting was much quieter and sadder than it should have been: both felt a separation at that time unnatural; but Isabel sought to cheer me and flatter herself by promising that she would come upon us some day in the west parlor unawares, and by anticipating the joy of such a meeting. I had not much faith in this prospect myself, or indeed in any thing that depended for its accomplishment on the will of Reginald Pompe.

I think Jean was more grieved than my mother at Isabel's non-appearance, or, at least, she said much more about it. There was a touching self-reproval in what my dear mother observed: "I did wrong to give my child away out of my own hands, Kathie," said she: "we might have struggled on all together, and I had no right to allow my responsibility to be assumed by your aunt. Isabel can not have the love for us that she would have felt if I had kept her; perhaps it is just that I should suffer for the neglect of my duties in the loss of her affection."

But I persuaded her to think that the child did not act from inclination in staying away, and that nothing could exceed her love for all of us. Yet even that was cold comfort to her mother's yearning heart.

LXII.

A few days after we came home Lilias Fenton arrived, blushing, to tell me that Stephen had at last obtained her father's consent to their marriage soon after the next Christmas; and she made me promise that after he returned to London I would assist her with my advice in preparing for the event. Talking of this made me think of my own wedding-clothes, lying half made in the drawers up stairs; and

when Lilias was gone home, I went to my room with the intention of turning them over—a thing I had never done since they were put away. Jean came to watch me.

"What a smell of death among that linen, Kathie! What things are they?" said she, carelessly.

"Don't you remember, Jean? They were put away two springs ago; they are damp, and it is the lavender that gives them the smell you feel."

She looked at me sorrowfully, but I was quite unmoved. Rarely, very rarely was Felix Mayne's name mentioned among us. Regularly as Thursday morning came round Ann brought me in his letters; I retired to my closet to read them; there also were they answered, and there whatsoever agonies or repinings I went through during those waiting years were hidden. They thought perhaps I was content thus to wear away my youth. It was my object that they should think so. Wherefore should we intrude our private sufferings on others, who can neither share nor ameliorate them? It is only just to bear our own burdens without seeking to transfer them to other folks' shoulders. Every heart has its own bitterness, and that is enough for a common human heart: there never was but One who willingly endured sorrows and griefs not his own.

It was at this period that Felix sent me a book of his. Both Mr. Withers and Francis Maynard told me that it had raised his name from that of an undistinguished country clergyman to the first ranks of his country's genius. I heard it with a thrill of pride. Had I not a right to be proud of his success?

I carried the book to the painted window one glowing August evening to enjoy it; my cheeks burned, my fingers quivered with excitement as I divided the pages. Yes; the smallest thing that affected Felix stirred me to the heart's core. How much more, then, this fulfillment of those dreams that he had suffered me to share! Would he seem the same in this utterance of his soul as he seemed to me?

I began to read. Did he think thus and thus? This deep knowledge of life, this cutting sarcasm, this cruel irony were all strange. Had he these moments of world-sickness such as were depicted? Had he thus prematurely come to the conclusion that there is no profit in any thing under the sun?

I closed the book weeping. It saddened me inexpressibly: it seemed as if my grandmother's warning were repeated to me; as if I were to blame for the darkened life that reproached me in the eloquent page.

It was nearly two years since we had met: for me those years had done nothing. I was faded and worn; all the little grace that youth had lent me was gone. At twenty-four I was a pale, hollow-chested woman, while most of my sex are still in their best days. I think, if we had come upon each other by chance, Felix would not have recognized me. The gray calm of my existence, so different from the stir of his, was becoming like a gulf between us. There was one bright spot in my week—his letters: all the rest was chill and dim as November. I could not say that I was unhappy; my cup lacked the last bitter drop; for, weary as I oftentimes was, there was this recollection to fall back upon—Felix loved me. And in my heart the tie was as strong as ever: time had stolen from it nothing. My sorest struggle was against my own selfishness; it was palpable that I was wrong thus to hamper him with my unfulfilled promise. I ought to have canceled it when Stephen left college. The first wrench would have been an agony to both, but calm would have come at last, and our other duties might have better sufficed us. As it was, we had referred so many things to the time when we should be together; a pleasure coming in my way by chance was passed as not worth seizing; but, on the other hand, troubles were robbed of half their weight by the remembrance that Felix's love was mine still.

As I held that book in my hand, I felt shivered up—chilled. Ah! it is a pitiful moment, that moment when the first

doubt of our power over one we idolize comes whispering to the shrinking heart that its labor is all weakness, and that it is falling slowly, slowly, yet surely asunder from what it leaned upon. That whisper came to me then.

LXIII.

That book was my companion for many days. I read and re-read it to conjure a gentler meaning out of its utterance. It was a very hard parable to me. As I knew Felix, he was kind of heart, generous, forgiving, faithful; he could not have written thus when a young man. It seemed like the outpouring of one who has gone about striving to work, and work well, but who has met with discouragement, ingratitude, and disaster, and who pauses and asks doubtfully, "Who will show me any good?" It was eloquent, forcible, and true as an expression of one phase of the writer's mind; but it gave me no adequate view of the greatness and strength that were in him. These dark thoughts would never, perhaps, have become articulate if his course had been earlier marked with success. The trail of bitterness and disappointment was visible amid the purest, loftiest aspirations. The man seemed to remember himself and his vain seekings in the ardor of new labors; to clutch cold truth with naked grasp, looking back wistfully all the while at old visions drifting away into the mists of the unreal. He had hoped more than ten men—even ten angels—could accomplish, and from a blind faith he had passed into a hard cynicism. Still he was longing to believe in the Good and the Beautiful, while in this chill, exceptional, and transitional mood, such as shrouds, once in their lives, all who think and feel, he asks, "Where are they? I have sought in vain: I can not see them."

But this dreary cloud would pass soon: his work, being done aright, must have a true issue, though he might not see it; for our work is eternal, whether it be careless, incom-

plete, selfish work, or profitable, straightforward, honest work. What we do, and how we do it, we must carry whither we shall go, to our shame and confusion, or to our honor. We may be impatient for results, we may demand to see the fruits of our labors, and be disappointed; but if we can lay it to our conscience that, according to our talent, we have striven our best, there need be no harassing fear that we have sown our ground with salt instead of grain: if we do not harvest it, God's angels will, and we shall find it safely garnered up against our day of account. "Do thou thy work: leave its results to Time."

Felix in that book, perhaps, to some appeared wise in the wisdom of this world; to me it seemed as if he had looked at life through a mist of his own raising, which warped things out of their true proportion. By-and-by I felt sure that mist would clear away, and that he would see the distortion of his views, and finally acknowledge that Duty, Love, Faith, Patience, Labor, are things actual and eternal—moral senses as truly existent as our physical senses. But meanwhile he was weary—he was desponding; and I—I who did so love him—was one cause. What could I do to amend the wrong? Nothing but what would at first sight seem a yet greater wrong. Through the mechanical round of my daily duties was one glistering thread—must I, *must* I sever it? I could not: the days were so joyless, so blank but for it. "Let me hope on a little longer," I earnestly prayed.

LXIV.

The time for Stephen's return to London drew on fast. He had been at home a fortnight, and his last evening was to be spent with some of his old schoolfellows who lived in the town. The afternoon of that day he passed with Lilias; and when he came in at seven o'clock to dress, he called me into his hutch to speak to him.

"Kathie, you will go in to see Lilias while I am away,"

said he. "Really the little thing loves me very much. Do you know, I left her crying, and she has been fancying I don't care for her as much as I did. Mind you have her here often."

I promised, and he told me that he had deferred his leave-taking till the morning.

It was, as usual, very late when he came home that night; my mother had gone up stairs, and I waited for him alone. Presently after one o'clock I heard snatches of a song in the court, and going in haste to the door, admitted Stephen—I am almost ashamed to write it—excessively drunk. The object he presented to my eyes was not a pleasant one; his countenance was flushed and stupid; and what was my disgust when I learned from his disjointed, maundering talk that he had been to Paul Fenton's house in that plight, and that Lilias herself had refused him admittance.

"Pale-faced little jade!" stuttered he, with the addition of an imprecation that it is needless to quote; "she'll never treat me with such cursed coolness again. I sha'n't get those fellows' jeers out of my mind for a twelvemonth, though she did let them know how she dotes on me."

He burst into a dreadful drunken laugh, and his face expressed a savage resentment. It is impossible for me to render his exact words, clipped as they were, as they driveled from his lips; but my brother though he was, they fired me with indignation and disgust.

"'Do go home, *dear* Stephen, do go home,'" murmured he, in a drunken imitation of Lilias's tone. "'*Dear* Stephen!' Bah! I hate her sickly voice. And then the little fool would go and cry herself to sleep, curse her! And to-morrow she will be watching for me ready primed with gentle rebukes and tearful expostulations. Ay, Mistress Lilias, but you will wait a long while before you will get my ears to listen to you."

It would have been breath wasted to reason with Stephen

in that condition; so, extinguishing the candles, I left him to his cool repose on the floor, and went to bed quite heart-sick.

The following morning I was up in good time to finish packing Stephen's luggage, but he himself did not appear until the porter from the coach-office came for his things, and then he complained of wretched headache. I expected to see him snatch up his hat and run over to Paul Fenton's, if it were but for five minutes; but instead he sat down, ate a hearty breakfast, and rushed up stairs to bid my mother, who was not yet risen, good-by. He came back into the parlor ready to start, gathered up his cloak, and kissed Jean and me as we followed him into the court.

"Have you no word for Lilias, Stephen?" I whispered.

"Not one: let her remember her conduct last night. If you like the office, you may make her know that our engagement is at an end, but I believe she understood me well enough. She never half loved me, and I don't care for her as much as I did when I was a lad. But I'd have married her, notwithstanding her want of money, if she had not treated me so shamefully; but good-by, or I shall be too late and miss the coach."

My blood boiled with indignation at Stephen's unworthiness, and I followed the first promptings of my anger by inditing to him a strong letter of remonstrance and rebuke, which I proposed should follow him to London; but, on reflection, I destroyed it, quite sure that Lilias's happiness could never be safe in such hands.

I heard nothing of her during that day or the following one, but on the third Ann told me that she had met Miss Fenton, who inquired if Stephen had gone to London, and seemed surprised when told that he had left two days before. I now dreaded a meeting with her; and though, during the ensuing week, she came several times, and went up to the hutch, where my mother sat in school-hours, I avoided seeing her by staying among my scholars. It was not until more

than a fortnight had elapsed that I saw her, and then she sent a message to desire me to go to her father's house that evening, as she wished to talk to me and could not go out. That morning we had received a letter from Stephen giving us a tolerably comfortable account of himself, but making no mention of Lilias: this omission my mother immediately observed, and I was obliged to explain to her the reason of it.

Paul Fenton was asleep in his chair when I went in, and his daughter took me up to her own room that we might not disturb him. She looked eager for news, but did not ask it. She began by telling me of what Stephen had done, not alluding to his disgraceful condition, but stating only the lateness of the hour as her reason for refusing to admit him. There was a slight tinge of displeasure in her tone as she spoke of his behavior, and I doubted not that this displeasure had been, at first, as keen as it was just; but a fortnight's silence had somewhat abated it.

"We heard from Stephen this morning," said I, compelled to speak by her questioning eyes. She felt all was not right; and to gain a little courage to ask what, she took an old casket from the table and began to show me its contents—some very ancient ornaments in gold filigree that her father had given her. I pretended to be admiring them, thinking in my own mind all the time how I should fulfill my task of undeceiving her.

It was a very sunny June evening, and through the low lozenge-paned window there came a flood of soft purple light; Lilias stood where it shone all about her, and surely any thing more fair or fragile summer sun never fell upon. Her hair hung in long, waved tresses, bright as threads of pale gold, and her dress was some rich lustrous stuff, shot with violet and amber. A deep rose burned on her cheeks, and her eyes were vividly and restlessly glittering, as her nervous fingers toyed with the narrow velvet clasped with Stephen's gift round her slender throat.

"Kathie, will you tell me what he said about that night? Was he very angry?" she asked, tremulously.

"*You* might have been so with reason, Lilias," I replied, weakly evading her question.

"Never mind that: I have forgiven him long since. Does he doubt it?"

"He considered himself the aggrieved person, and was deeply offended; he has behaved shamefully;" said I.

"Oh!" was all that Lilias answered, but it went to my heart, it seemed to break so like an agony from hers.

For some minutes we sat quite silent. Lilias did not seem to have the power to ask any further questions then. After a painful pause, she added, "Perhaps he will not write to me again?" This as if she half expected a denial. "I understand," she proceeded, with forced calm, "he is very angry: he will cease to care for me at all; he will not love me any more?" All this interrogatively. My lips were sealed; any consolation that I could have offered must have been a lie; I let her draw her own conclusions from my silence. "You would tell me if Stephen named me in his letter."

"Yes, Lilias, I would; but he does not." She looked at me drearily for a few minutes, till the voice of the old man was heard calling to her from below.

"Do not tell him," she whispered to me; "he must know nothing about it. It makes him happy to think, if he should die, Stephen would take care of me."

I assented, and we went down into the parlor together. Paul bade her come and shake up his cushions, and, as she did so, he gazed wistfully up in her face, stroked the little hands that moved about him so gently, and asked her if her cough were better. She replied that it was, and then adding something about her flowers, went out into the garden. Her father watched her as she moved slowly to and fro, with her arms hanging listlessly by her sides, and her head bent down.

"What is in her heart, I wonder," he said, in his maundering way. "What ails her?"

She came in again presently, but with such a lagging step I scarcely knew it; and when I went home, she accompanied me to the door, holding me by the hand: hers felt quite hot and feverish. "Kathie," she said, hesitatingly, "*you* will not forsake me for what is come and gone? You will let Jean come to see me? You will come too?"

"Yes, Lilias, oftener than ever; and you must not forget my mother: you know how she loves you," I replied, drawing her nearer to me.

"If you will have me sometimes, I shall like to come." She seemed as if she would have added something more, but, checking herself, she kissed my cheek, and said, with a wan smile, that she would go and water her flowers, for they had been forgotten during the last week, and were pining for drought.

LXV.

None of my brother's subsequent letters contained any mention of Lilias, or any allusion to his broken engagement. I think she did not, all at once, abandon her hope that Stephen might relent; she, indeed, knew but little of the selfish hardness of his real character. She always spoke kindly of him, and thought so; neither did she shrink from naming him, as some would. My mother and she spoke of him together, and she was always pleased to hear the most trivial details of his letters read. On one or two occasions she even asked to take them home with her. Those letters never were returned.

I can not say that there was any sudden change came over her at this time. She never had been otherwise than delicate. Paul confided to me, with trembling, that the disease of which her mother died was developing itself, and bade me not tell Stephen yet, lest it should kill him. I felt guilty at letting the poor old man go on in his delusion, though it comforted him.

People talk of broken hearts: those who use that form of expression would have said that Lilias's heart was broken; the physicians, whom Paul called in and feed magnificently, named it decline. They did not falsify their skill by pretending they could cure her. They talked vaguely of the uncertain progress of the disorder, and the influence of the weather; gave a few harmless medicines and a few cautions, which her father jealously adhered to. He was, as it were, engaged in a hand-to-hand conflict with death for the possession of his best and dearest, and he held his own with the convulsive grip of despair.

I was backward and forward a great deal that autumn, for the sick girl had not many friends, and seemed to find the pleasantest relief in our society. My mother and Jean were also often with her. Thus I was brought much into contact with Paul, but I always shrank from seeing him alone, for, as a relief to his burdened mind, he would sometimes reveal to me portions of his past history—deeds of bold wrong and subtle fraud, for which he thought Lilias was to bear the punishment and be the sacrifice.

One gloomy October evening I remember well. Lilias had suffered much during the day, and had been prevailed on to lie down in bed, where she presently sank into a feverish sleep. Paul was in an agony of excitement. He felt that he was going to be worsted in this struggle for his darling; that perhaps a few weeks, or even days, would see death the victor. His self-upbraidings were miserable to listen to. He talked wildly of two brothers, a summer night, and a river; of one being carried down by the current, and uttering a cry for help, which the other might have given, but withheld.

"Cain," said he, "was not, in God's sight, more a murderer than was that man. Could there be forgiveness for such a one? could there be peace?"

Then he raved of gold gained by this brother's death, and of the curse that came with it; of the last despairing cry

that haunted him wherever he went; of the success that dogged his footsteps like his shadow, depriving him of the excitement of fear and hope; of how failure had been impossible to him, and how the tide of his wealth could have no ebb until he and it fell together into the gulf of death. Sometimes he blasphemed Heaven awfully, and tried to persuade himself that *here* would be the end; but his leprous conscience would not be so cheated. One moment he moaned piteously, "Lilias, Lilias!" the next raved passionately of swift streams, and secrets that they bear away to the deep sea; then turned full round in his chair, as if to confront a visible accuser, and passionately averred his innocence. Next a season of sickening dread came over him. He talked of drifting on a shoreless sea—drifting eternally—pursued by demons which hid among the foam, and tortured him with drowning wails and ever-watchful eyes. Then his face was awful—rigid and white; drops of sweat stood on his forehead; his limbs writhed, as if battling with fierce waves; and a gurgling cry struggled from his lip, as if a death-stream were flowing over it.

I thought him mad. I had heard it whispered often; now I was sure of it.

Unable to bear the sight of his torture any longer, I stole away to Lilias's room. She still slept, so I sat down in the shadow of the curtain between the window and the bed. Presently Paul came in, and stood leaning toward the child's unconscious face with his tremulous hands locked one in the other. He began to talk to her about Stephen. At the sound of his name she opened her eyes, smiled faintly, and asked, "What of him?"

"Would Lilias like him to come to her?" said the old man; "shall we send for him?"

"No, father, he might grieve; I want nobody but you now. Kiss me, father."

I crept away unobserved, and left her cheering Paul with

pleasant words, bidding him hope both for her and himself. Her thought was all for him now: she knew that her days were already "as a tale that is told," but tried to cheer him to the last. He deserved it from her; for, whatever his own sins, his love for her was deep and enduring.

LXVI.

As the winter advanced, Lilias's strength wore more quickly away. One night, just before Christmas, I went in, and found her and Paul sitting one on each side of the fire. Lilias showed me that she had decked the room for Yule-tide, and asked if any body was coming to spend it with us—meaning, I supposed, Stephen or Felix Mayne.

I said no; we should be quite alone.

After that she sat for a long while with her hands clasping her knees, her head bent forward, and her bright, bright eyes fixed on the fire. Paul never took his covetous gaze from her face. He had watched the signs of decay before, and knew them every one; he saw what was at hand, and had ceased to moan. The shadow was settling down on his hearthstone, never more to be lifted.

"Lilias, Lilias, what dost thou see in the fire? What ails thee?" he once asked, tremulously.

"Oh, father, I am very weary. I thought I heard music."

"It is the Christmas waits," said I; and listened, but heard nothing.

Ann said afterward, when we talked of it at home, it was her *call.*

They both resumed their watch, he of her face, she of the faces in the fire.

Yet a few days more, and Paul tottered alone from room to room of the silent house, carefully darkening every window by which a garish sunbeam could steal in. And Lilias lay dead in her hushed chamber, while the joy-bells of the old Minster close by rang the old year out and the new year in.

LXVII.

From some unexplained cause, my sister Isabel's marriage with Reginald Pompe did not take place so early as was fixed, and we were not without hopes that the engagement might be broken off. But in January we received a letter from her in Paris; she had been quietly married at Dover, where she and Aunt Aurelia were staying, and had gone abroad immediately, so that there was not the slightest prospect of her ever coming to Eversley.

My aunt's marriage with Colonel Longstaff took place shortly after, and they also went to reside on the Continent —I think at Tours.

My dear mother, whether from disease, which had been steadily undermining her constitution, or from prolonged anxiety, I can not say, fell ill during the spring of this year; and when she rose from her sick-bed, though still firm in mind and every faculty, her working days were over. By Jean's thoughtfulness and care I was left at liberty to continue my school as usual, or else I know not into what poverty we might have sunk. My mother's annuity was still lost to us, and would be so for yet many years to come; a heavy doctor's bill was to be provided for in addition to all our daily recurring wants, and a dark day seemed gathering for us.

In this extremity I thought it not wrong to ask Stephen again to share with us, at least, in the payment of his remaining debts. He replied that it was impossible, for he had married Flora Brunton and set up housekeeping; he was just on the point of applying to us for a loan himself. He must have thought that we were made of money! No hope, therefore, from that quarter.

These cares began to weigh on my spirits like a nightmare. I grew prematurely old; the one gray hair that Isabel had espied soon came to be multiplied by hundreds, and I

lost my last faint tint of spring bloom. The change came gradually and unnoticed.

I looked at my father's books, most of them useless to us, but all of considerable money value, and one evening proposed to my mother that they should be sold. She did not like the proposition at all; she objected to such a manner of supplying our needs as a slight upon his memory. Though I could not enter into her feelings there, the subject was not pressed. There was another sore trouble upon me just then, which I was writhing under in silence, and for a time that put off all care for small things. It was that I was having the last fierce struggle with my heart to give up Felix.

LXVIII.

"So you are seventeen to-day, little Jean!" said my mother, patting the rosy face that bent down to kiss her.

"Seventeen! Oh, what a monstrous age! I am quite a woman grown, and must begin to 'behave conformable,' as Ann says. Kathie, stand by me, to show our mother how much taller I am than you."

I left the tea that I was pouring out for my mother's breakfast, and we stood back to back. Jean was two inches my superior in height, an advantage in which she felt a sort of harmless pride. She was, besides, slight, delicately shaped, and very pretty; not radiantly beautiful like Isabel, but of that quiet, placid order of loveliness that looks bright and cheerful after the snows of age have frosted brown hair, and faded the rose-flush of youth on the cheek. Such a face hers was as one loves to see in the midst of children, making a serene light around the hearth of home; such a face as many a man's and woman's mémory shrines in its holiest niche, and links with the first prayer learned from a mother's lips.

"Is Isabel taller than I am, Kathie?" Jean said, with an interest that made my mother and me smile involuntarily.

"Yes; she is quite a majestic height."

"I wish I could see her; we should scarcely know each other: it is three years since she went away; I think she will never come back," and Jean leaned her chin on her hand, and looked as if she were solving a difficult arithmetical problem, while my mother sighed heavily.

On such an occasion as Jean's birth-day a whole holiday was given to our scholars, and in the evening many of those who had been children when she was came to have tea with us. They were quite a merry party in all: Effie and Rachel Withers (Polly was lately married to a young clergyman, and gone to Carlisle), Janey Munroe, and others of the same generation.

It was among these gay young people—all women ranging from the ages of seventeen to twenty—that I felt most strongly how far I had overstepped the bounds of youth. They all looked up to me as a person of age and gravity, who had been a grown-up woman and had taught them when they went to school under the charge of a nursemaid. So, after tea was over, and these happy young creatures, just on the threshold of womanhood, drew together to talk, I felt that I might be a restraint upon them, and therefore withdrew to my mother's room. She had got the large family Bible on the table beside her, and was poring over the entries, written by my father, of our births, and of the deaths of my two little brothers. She shut the book as I entered, and looked up with tear-bright eyes. "So, you have left them down stairs, Kathie?" said she, gently.

"Yes, mother."

"I have been looking at these dates, and reckoning up: poor little Willie would have been nineteen and Robin twenty-one if they had lived. Bring me a pen, and I will write the days of Stephen's and Isabel's marriages." I did as she bid me, and when she had inserted the necessary date in the blank spaces left for the purpose, she glanced up and said, "How the time flies, Kathie! It is ten years since your father died."

"It seems a long while since to me, mother."

"You don't look well to-night, Kathie: what ails you?"

"Nothing, dear mother, nothing at all. I am quite well."

"You seem sad, as if something had happened?"

"Nothing has happened. May I read you a chapter, mother?"

"If you please, Kathie; I should like it."

So I drew the book over the table and began: for a long while I read on mechanically, scarcely hearing the words I uttered, and forming them into no sense whatever. One of those dead trances of hope was on me when my heart said bitterly, "All is vanity."

My mother asked me to turn to the last chapter but one of the Revelation. I did so, and proceeded steadily to the fourth verse: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away."

My voice failed: I shut the book, and dropped my face upon my hands.

"It has been a long while to wait, Kathie, a weary while," said my mother, tenderly; but most lives have many such failings of the heart before they come where there shall be 'no more pain.'"

I raised my head and tried to be cheerful, not to grieve her. I spoke of Stephen, and said that there was a prospect of his becoming really steady now that he was settled.

"Yes, I hope so, Kathie. Then he may see the propriety of releasing us from the burden of his debts." (I had not told her of my last application to him and its failure.) "Then you will be free to live for yourself."

"Don't let us talk of that, mother; it is all over now," I answered, quietly, playing with the ring that Felix had put upon my finger so long ago.

"All over, Kathie! What do you mean? Have you broken your engagement?"

"Yes, mother. It was right to give it up; I ought to have done so long since. Look at me—I am not what I was; every year makes me less fitted to be Felix Mayne's wife. I am not the same Kathie he loved seven years ago. It is all over, dear mother. No more waiting, no more Thursday letters."

"And you did not consult me, Kathie. It might yet have been."

"Never, mother; I believe I have done what is right. I belong to you only, now; no other home claims me. I am content."

"Oh, child! you have done this for me."

"And for him, mother. He will find a wife who is his equal now. The world has gone on with him, while with me it has stood still. It is all past and ended; let us put it away like a book whose last chapter we have read. Mine, after all, will not have been a wasted life."

"No, my poor Kathie!"

My mother's eyes were overflowing with tears as she looked at me pitifully; but I was calm, quite calm, since I had told her all. I had written the letter that morning; it was still on its way, and I had not had time to realize my life as it would be with all its future darkened and its pleasant light blotted out. Perhaps I was stunned yet by the self-inflicted shock, and could not feel.

LXIX.

"There are other things in life besides marrying and giving in marriage," I said to myself that night. "Felix has work and care; I have work and care. We should have been happy together—yes, ours would have been a complete existence; but destiny fights against us, and we must live, suffer, and die apart." Then stoicism broke down, and passion had its utterance. "Shall I never, *never* see him again? Can it be true that I have thrust his love away from me—

that I have myself let in those floods of blackness over my soul? Oh, I can not bear it, I can not bear it! Let me die! Let me die now! Oh, I have been wicked and cruel to him! I have been treacherous, and he will hate me!" And the paroxysm passed in a storm of tears.

I went about my work with a numb, frozen pressure on all my senses; a sort of death-in-life sensation, as when a heavy pain throbs through every fevered nerve, and drags, and tears, and wrenches it without cessation. I had conjured him not to write to me again; there was nothing to look forward to, no relief to hope for, no severer agony to dread. A Thursday morning came and went; another; yet another —and no letter.

"I have but to look my life in the face and grow resigned," I said. And I tried to be still at heart again—in vain.

Nearly a month had passed; the keen agony had worn itself down into a stony apathy, broken sometimes with a shrieking pain. This love had been the one strong sensation of my being—its vitality, in short; rent away from it, I became almost as a body without a soul. All elasticity, fortitude, endurance left me. I worked, spoke, acted like a machine. I dreaded sometimes lest I should go mad. Once I thought I would write to Felix, but from that folly I was kept. Then I wished he would send me a letter—even if it were full of the hard reproaches that I deserved.

One quiet April evening, when the sun was setting, I went up into Stephen's hutch, and stood a while at the window watching the sky. It was brightly, gorgeously beautiful, but to me inexpressibly dreary. There seemed to be no pity in heaven; its glow and glory mocked me.

"It would shine so if he were dead," I thought.

There was the blackness of mourning nowhere but in my heart. Even little Jean came caroling down the stairs as I stood idly conversing with my sorrow. I must get away from myself somehow. I dressed in haste and left the house;

I did not want rest, but distraction. Down Friar-gate and onward, over the Barbican Bridge, I hastened as if urgent business called me; these low streets had poured forth their crowds, and I thridded through them as if some end were to be attained by speed. The daylight was giving place to a reeking, misty gloom; the old streets looked older in it, the shabby houses shabbier, and the forlorn groups, clustered at the outlet of each passage-way, more miserable and destitute. The dark and ancient gate once passed, the twilight country stretched out beyond; but this I sought not; rather the stir and bustle of the multitude than my own heart now; its thoughts were not safe company. Turning to the right, I re-entered the town by the Castle Mills Bridge, and under the gloom of the prison walls crept in among the crowd again. It must have been either the assize week, or some great fair or market, for there were hundreds of people moving to and fro the streets, which was not the case in Eversley at ordinary times. In the High Street, the lamps were lighted as I passed down it, but when I came to the Minster neighborhood all was dark.

Not eased of my aching burden, not refreshed in any manner, I entered the house again, and crawled wearily up stairs to the west parlor. At first I thought it was empty, and the fire out; but another glance showed me that it was only hidden by a figure bending between it and me. This figure rose up as I drew near, and Felix Mayne faced me. I stretched out my two hands helplessly, deprecatingly; I should have fallen if he had not caught me.

"Kathie, I have been ill, miserably ill," he began: "I wanted to send for you, when that wretched letter came and stopped me. Now I am here, I want to know from your own lips what you mean."

"Oh, Felix, spare me!"

"No, Kathie, I will spare you nothing. You have played with me seven years, and I have the right to ask you why

you drop the game so suddenly. If you hold to what that letter conveys, then, Kathie, you never *did* love me, and never *can* love me, as I have done you."

I said nothing: I sat crushed, broken under the weight of his resentment. I saw his face: it was dark, worn, hollow; the hair on his temples was gray and thin; the lines of his features sharpened; his eyes vivid, restless, and passionate. I shrank from them as a criminal might shrink before his judge.

"Kathie, you say nothing? Why have you led me on all this time, to throw me off at last? Could any man have loved you more faithfully than I have done? You know it is treacherous and cruel, this deed of yours."

"Yes, Felix."

"Kathie, while you sit there with that white, stony, passive, listless face, do you not know that I am almost mad? Have you said your last words to me, when you acquiesce in my saying you have acted treacherously by me?"

"Felix, I have nothing to plead but this—my mother is ill, and we have no money; I must work for her and for Jean. I dare not let my mother's life be the limit of my probation and yours. I asked you for my freedom, because between us there is but this, and my happiness must not depend on the release from a duty such as mine."

"You mean that you never could marry me until your mother's death?"

"Yes."

"I have enough for all, and more than enough; what I have worked for was *you*, Kathie: I am richer and poorer than ever I was. Richer, because money is plenty with me; poorer, because you shamefully take away all the value and reward of what I have done. How *dare* you do it?"

"Felix, if I had done this three years since, it had been right; but I was selfish and could not: the necessity remained, and at last forced itself on me."

"Kathie, I say again, I have enough for all."

"My mother would never bear dependence even on her children."

"That is a contradiction: you are giving your heart's blood to her now."

"Felix, leave me—do leave me."

"Is that your last word, Kathie? Is all my patience to go for nothing?"

"Felix, go away and hate me: I have done you grievous wrong, and am not worthy that you should love me," I supplicated.

"No, Kathie, you are just as weak and obstinate as other women. You are not the creature you once were: for years you have gone on hardening into a set form of self-negation and duty until you are a mere statue, and no longer flesh and blood. You are bartering away my life and your own for a chimera. Do you not see it?"

I kept silence; I felt, indeed, like an unworthy outcast—too low even for contempt. The idea of doing right upheld me no more: I was undergoing the punishment of a duty once neglected, and now to be done doubly, and with twice the first difficulty.

He waited a little while, and his features took a hard, iron set, as if they never would relax again. "Kathie, will your lips never open for me more?" he asked, in a deep, chilling, reserved tone. "Am I to go and never inflict my presence upon you again?"

I uttered no word, made no movement to arrest his departure. He walked to the door, paused, and came back: "Kathie, it is a grand mistake; you love me all the time. Why will you make yourself ice to me?"

I looked up in his face; it seemed to waver and change, and then to fade from my vision altogether. For a moment it seemed as if death were coming to end it all; but with a desperate effort I clutched back expiring consciousness and

said, "Felix, you are killing me. Spare me your reproaches."

"Well, Kathie, I am going." He held out his hand, and I laid mine within it; it was cold as a stone, and it dropped to my side like one when it fell from his grasp. My face was hidden, and the closing of the door told me he was gone.

Jean was descending the stairs as I went up. She stopped and said, "Kathie, you look as if you had seen a ghost."

"So I have, Jean; I have been face to face with my dead youth and happiness."

And thus they learned that Felix Mayne had been with me.

LXX.

This was a break in the black tedium of my suffering: for a time I was stunned; but presently I woke up to the consciousness of the new life before me—the long, long blank of quiet endurance, with no light beyond except the far-off glimmer of another world. As yet, the peace that may arise out of regular duties done was none of mine. I hid my trouble in my own heart, but that it ravaged, that it desolated miserably.

Of Felix I dared not think. I could remember only his gray, iron face, as I saw it last: the worn, restless expression; the cold rebuke of his eye.

It is useless to say more of this. The summer passed, the autumn fruitage was gathered, and another Yule-tide approached.

Perhaps—perhaps I was not quite prepared for what came at this season; it came without any previous warning: I had *said* that I wished it; but in my heart of hearts I thought it would never be. Felix Mayne was married.

The news reached me in a stiff, old-fashioned letter from Hannah: it was a brief and contradictory, but kindly-meant composition. Her master was married, she wrote, to the sweetest of young ladies—a bishop's daughter, and very beau-

tiful. Her name was Emmeline. A few regrets for me were mixed up with enthusiastic praises of her new mistress. "I hoped it would have been you, Miss Kathie, because you seemed to suit my master every way. When you was over at Kingston, at the time of the fever, I made up my mind nothing could part you if it were not death, which shows we have no right to count for certain on any thing in this world," the old servant said. Then she added that her mistress was almost a child, but very docile and gentle, and fond of being among her flowers and birds in the conservatory, and that her master's new living was in a beautiful place, the like of which she had never lived in before. She ended by saying that she took the liberty to write because she was sure that any way and every way I should be glad to hear of her master's happiness.

I tried to persuade myself that I was glad: it was the best thing that could have happened—certainly it was. Still there was a grain, a very little grain of bitterness in my feelings. He had not taken long to replace me; I was soon forgotten. It was with a very listless step and tired mind that I went about my work that day; but the children were more tedious or perverse than usual, and I was forced to exert myself.

By night, when all was over, and I sat alone in the parlor, other thoughts came to me. I stirred the fire, and made a glorious blaze; the glow penetrated to my spirit. I took out Hannah's letter, and read it again. The whole aspect of things was changed. It was right that Felix should marry: he had already wasted the best years of his life in waiting for me: he was growing despondent, for he was one whose nature imperiously demanded love, and interest, and hope. With this fair young Emmeline he would be happy again—his life's spring would be renewed.

"Yes, it is right; it is for the best, and I will be glad," I said aloud. There was still my home for me, with its

cares, duties, and love. No need longer to grieve over two wasted lives: his was restored, and embellished, and cheered; and even round mine interests would yet gather, though not personal and selfish interests.

Such were the consolations I tried to lay to my heart, sitting alone by the winter fire. Then I conjured back certain scenes of long ago: the school-room at Crofton in the twilight; the garden one afternoon, with blue sky overhead, sunlight dancing on the grass through waving branches, and words never to be forgotten, which had brightened my young heart to perfect happiness.

From this day I began to live somewhat in the past; the future had lost its allurements. Old scenes, faces of old friends, formed themselves clear reflections in the winter fire; certain tones in the wind, certain aspects of the sky, swept musically over my memory. Disappointment did not embitter me, and I had a gentler feeling for all those to whom it had been cruel and hardening. I could be thankful that home was still left me to make the breaking away of more passionate love less desolating.

It was strange what a deep quiet came to me by-and-by after the news of Felix's marriage. "My life for myself is ended—I may live henceforward for others. I give up being young or having any hopes on my own account," was my prevalent thought; and till then I never knew what a vast amount of consideration, hope, faith, and charity had been centred on myself, and myself only. Even a degree of cheerfulness returned to me, and I no longer moved about the house like a discontented ghost. (A new day of a pale, shady October tint had dawned over my life, and it was worth having, since the summer was ended.)

LXXI.

The doctor's bill contracted during my mother's illness was not sent in, and, trusting that what we had economized

might meet it, I asked that it should be given to me. The doctor was an awfully stern-looking person, whom the undertakers would perhaps have found it well to testimonialize, if his professional skill had not counteracted the gloomy effects of his countenance on his patients. No notice was taken of my request; so one day, encountering Dr. Riley in the Close, I named it again. He did not know any thing about a bill—all the bills had gone out punctually on New Year's day.

"But we have not received ours, Dr. Riley," I persisted.

"Then your name is not in the books, and there is no bill for you. My respects to your excellent mother—no thanks. Good-day to you;" and, with a jerking bow, Dr. Riley passed on.

I had heard of his benevolence before with some incredulity; but ever since, when any body of a particularly sour, grim look comes across me, I always give him credit for a charitable disposition and the best intentions for Dr. Riley's sake.

In my short walks with Jean, when our mother was well enough to be left for half an hour, I generally chose the quiet West-gate suburb of our old town, where the Hospital for Maiden Ladies was situated. It was familiarly styled "The Old Maids." I used to look up at it with prophetic eye, thinking that when I was aged and alone in the world I might find a peaceful retreat there, for I had friends among the clergy, in whose gift the charity lay. One evening we met Miss Bootle and Miss Linnet: the last-named old lady had just been elected to rooms in the hospital from among fifteen candidates: she had been long a governess. Jean asked if she were comfortable in her new abode.

"I should be perfectly comfortable, my dear, but for the disappointment of the fourteen who did not get in," replied she; "but I had been twelve years on the list—the longest of any; and, besides, I am the eldest — seventy-six, Miss Brande."

"Kathie is interested in the place. Will you tell us what it is like inside, and how you live?" said my sister.

"You had better come some afternoon and take tea with me, Kathie, and then we will show you all over the Home —'Ladies' Home,' not Hospital," interposed Miss Bootle, with a little prancing air of dignity.

"It is exquisitely clean, and we have each two rooms, and twenty pounds a year," said Miss Linnet. "It used to be either twenty-five or thirty pounds, but it has fallen off. Perhaps property is worth less than it was a hundred years ago, when the Home was founded."

"Nothing of the sort," snapped Miss Bootle; "somebody has swallowed it up, as somebody always does swallow up charitable bequests."

"There is a portress or housekeeper, but most of us wait upon ourselves," Miss Linnet continued, without heeding the interruption. "I make my fire and my bed the same as others do, which we have not been accustomed to. But it is nice to have a certain shelter over our heads until we are carried to church in our coffins. Some poor governesses go through *horrors* when they are past work—starvation—yes, my dears."

"The Minster clock will strike nine directly; we shall be locked out, Linney, if we don't go," said Miss Bootle, nervously.

"Do they ever turn old ladies out of the Home?" asked Jean, laughing.

"Not unless they marry or *otherwise* disgrace themselves, the rules say. I advise you to keep out, Jean, for you would make mischief among us. Now good-night, my dears; there is the clock," said Miss Bootle; and the two ancient ladies disappeared through the door in the wall which secluded their dwelling and garden from the irreverent and satirical public eye.

Was I, after all, to spend my last days in that grim old

house? It was scarcely worth while speculating yet, though I had turned the ominous "corner," the quarter of a century, for there was still another five-and-twenty years for me to battle in the wide world before my anchor could be cast there. But already my face would have been a favorable introduction, for it was rapidly assimilating itself to some of those gray, solemn visages that we saw, now and then, under the Old Maids' porch, or looking out of the Old Maids' windows.

LXXII.

Just after Christmas—indeed, I believe it was on New Year's day—my brother Stephen wrote us word that his wife had brought him twins—a boy and a girl. He wished me to travel up to London during the holidays to see them; for Flora was only delicate, and his domestic arrangements did not go on so comfortably as was desirable. My mother's growing weakness, however, compelled me to decline the invitation; and as Flora had her own mother and sisters within reach, I did so without any difficulty. Jean, also, had long promised a visit to her married schoolfellow at Carlisle, and I would not have disappointed her on any account; and to Ann it would not have been safe to confide any body who required care, for her wits were generally wool-gathering.

She had, in her time, captivated several lovers, but the favored one was Joe: that identical tinman, through whose culpable negligence the household saucepans had once been imperiled. Joe must have been of very tender age at the commencement of the courtship, for he was seven years younger than Ann: they had been *off and on*, as she called it, for a long time, but now the affair seemed to be approaching a crisis.

My mother offered a gentle remonstrance on the subject of their disparity of age, to which Ann replied that Joe would be older before *she* married him—quite losing sight of

the fact that she would progress at the same rate, and still keep seven years ahead.

For some months past she had been knitting stockings with a view to Joe's feet—members disproportionately large for the body they supported.

The courtship was carried on chiefly at the stairs' foot, and appeared to consist of brief sentences from Joe, titters from Ann, and prolonged silences. I have known them stand for the space of two hours there, acting as a padlock on the parlor door, for I had a delicacy about interrupting these permitted *tête-à-têtes*.

Ann's eccentricities were redoubled at this period, and if ever I had occasion to name any shortcoming in her work, she always unblushingly excused herself by saying, "Oh, Miss Kathie, I were thinking about Joe;" and, of course, under such circumstances, I knew better than to find fault.

This was Jean's first absence from home, and we missed her very much indeed. The blithe, pleasant ways she had were like sunshine in the house; and from the hour she went away to the hour she came back, my mother and I never ceased wishing for her. On the evening of her return, after our mother was asleep, we staid up in the west parlor to talk over her visit, and Polly Withers's baby, and other things.

"Now, Kathie, I have something very particular to tell you," whispered Jean, with a blush, when the general news was disposed of. "I am afraid I am very selfish, sister; I am indeed."

"It must be something quite new if you are: let me hear about it."

"Well—it is about Francis Maynard."

I started and gazed in my sister's face, now suffused with a vivid blush. "Go on, my darling."

"He has not forgotten us, as it seemed: he has been traveling to Jerusalem, and I can not tell where besides—all

over, I think. And, Kathie, he is coming over to Eversley very soon."

"Is that all, Jean?"

"No, Kathie: he has asked me to be his wife."

"He is the selfish person in this case, I think."

"And I half promised I would, Kathie."

"You were right, Jean; and the news makes me happier than you can believe." Nevertheless, my voice trembled, and tears dimmed my eyes.

"Yet it seems selfish to leave you to work alone. What will our mother say? Will she not feel it unkind?"

"No, Jean, no. It will comfort her to know that you are safe under the care of such a good man as Francis Maynard; it comforts me too. It is exactly what we should have asked for you if we had both had on our wishing-caps. It is quite suitable and right."

"You used to think him rather proud and stiff, Kathie, but he is not so at all; he is very kind and merry now, and *so* clever."

"Of course he is. Well, mother must be told these good tidings. Ah! Jeanie, bairns are a charge, you see."

"Francis has been presented to a living in Cumberland, and he says we must be married soon. He does not like long engagements."

"He is very wise," responded I.

"He is coming to stay with his uncle Withers next week," added Jean, with a little hesitation, "and he wishes all to be settled while he is here. Oh, Kathie, you must not think it is *I* am in such haste; indeed, it is all Francis."

"You have nothing to wait for; and the sooner you marry, now that you have agreed to pass your lives together, the better."

"You did not think so for yourself, Kathie."

"There seemed to be difficulties and impediments in my case which do not exist in yours, Jean; I would not have

you go through such a tedium of waiting, and hoping, and wearying as I did, for the world. To think! Here we sit over the fireside, coolly talking of marrying *you*. It seems only the other day that you were quite a baby thing, pottering over your sampler, and learning Watts's Hymns."

Jean smiled pleasantly. That was a long time ago to her, and in the years between then and now were many waymarks of feeling, that showed how her girlhood and womanhood were come upon her. Child as I still had thought her, heart and mind were ripening fast to summer. It was well for Jean that a fair destiny was to be hers; she was not one to cope with difficulties, or to support much arduous work. A calm sky and a still atmosphere suited her well; in a fierce storm, or a dreary, chilling winter of sorrow, she would have sunk exhausted. How is it that for some the stream of life flows so smoothly, while for others it is ever among the breakers?

When my mother was told the news, she received it with undisguised gladness, as I had expected; but it recalled to her my fate, and she would have revived it, but I bade her hush. Once *Requiescat* pronounced over a sorrow, it should have no resurrection. If its pale ghost revisit us in the watches of the night, we must entertain the unbidden guest, but let it not intrude at noon or come as a spectre to a wedding feast.

It was between two and three years since I had seen Francis Maynard, and in the interim he had run through a very creditable college career. He possessed talent, and had gained some distinction as a classical scholar; altogether he was a man for whom you might predict a straightforward and honorable, if not a brilliant course. His appearance was prepossessing, his manner lively and courteous; but it was for his sterling moral worth and even temper that my mother chiefly valued him: they were the two things she ranked of first importance in married happiness.

There were a few among Francis Maynard's relatives who did not cordially approve the match; they thought that, with his prospects, he might have aspired higher. He wished this ill feeling to be overcome; and that these cavilers might know and learn to approve his choice, he interested for Jean his maiden aunt, Mrs. Alberta Withers, who lived in the Minster Close, not far from the Deanery. This lady conceived a strong partiality for Jean, and took great delight in introducing her among her future connections.

Oh, how pretty the child looked when she was dressed to go to one of the solemn tea-parties in the Close! I always decked her myself, with our mother looking on; and she used to wear soft white muslin, with knots of blue or cherry-colored ribbon, and her abundant brown hair in glossy ringlets on her neck. She was not queenly, like Isabel, but so fresh, dainty, and graceful, you just longed to take her in your arms and kiss her. No wonder that with such a fair, loving creature in his heart, Francis Maynard was deaf to all whispers of self-interest. Before he returned to Cumberland, it was settled among us that they should be married in May; the interval was quite long enough for preparation.

LXXIII.

One night, in the early part of March, when Jean and I were sitting with my mother up in her room, we heard Ann scudding about below with extra noise and bustle. In a few minutes she burst into the room, stocking in hand, the ball of worsted absent without leave, and the needles running out of the stitches; she was also without cap, and in manifest disorder, both mental and bodily.

"Oh, Miss Kathie, oh, ma'am, this pumpitation!" she gasped, hurriedly, pressing one hand against her side; "oh, Miss Kathie, Joe says it is the jackdaws, or else the men who have been mending the clock. Oh, my heart!"

We none of us attempted to precipitate the news Ann was

panting to tell, knowing by experience that hurry always retarded her the more; but Jean smiled.

"It isn't a laughing matter, jackdaws or no," said Ann, with an offended air.

"Certainly not; it is very painful," replied my mother, soothingly, thinking that the "pumpitation" was referred to.

"Yes, ma'am, I'm sure is it," responded Ann, ameliorated; "it is an awful sight, for when Joe told me, I just ran as far as Kill-Canon-Corner to get a look. There's crowds upon crowds of people, engines, soldiers, and the old Dean in the thick of it all."

"*Please*, Ann, do tell us what is going on," supplicated Jean, comically.

"The Minster's afire!"

I ran into my closet and looked out: the air was full of a lurid smoke; the bell-tower showed like a furnace; the Close was quite light with the flames.

"I must go, Jean—I must go to see it," whispered I, as she came with her quick breathing behind me.

If it had been a living thing that I had known and loved, the sight could not have moved me more. It was impossible to sit there still while this friend of all times, this dumb, eloquent friend, was being destroyed. I dragged on my cloak, shrouded my head in the hood, and ran out. A great multitude of people were there, surging to and fro like waves of the sea, shouting in hoarse, excited voices, and adding their tumult to the fierce roaring of the fire. The whole length of the nave was flame; flame vomited forth in forked jets from the windows; the puny streams of water seemed as drops to all that seething mass of fire. From time to time the crash of falling timber lulled the flames for an instant, but only to stir them up to fiercer strength. The machinery and flooring being gone, at length fell the glorious old bells, giving out their last broken peal as they rang down through the red blaze. A shout broke from the multitude at the hear-

ing of that knell; awed, superstitious faces gazed up helplessly at the ruin, and dark whispers circulated among the crowd. I had staid on the outskirts of the throng, and presently I observed Paul Fenton standing near me, bareheaded, and with his poor white hairs fluttering in the keen March wind. I asked him how he did.

"Bravely, bravely," he replied, rubbing his hands, as if he were warming them at the fire. "Look at those demons writhing in the blaze! they have watched and mocked me for seventy years, and it is my turn now. I am enjoying it hugely. I have come to see them tormented. Watch them. It is grand. Dear, dear, that I should have lived to see it! I'm an old man, a miserable, poor old man—very poor."

His voice sank into a pitiful whine as the insane excitement faded out of his eyes; I should have moved away, but his skeleton fingers grasped my arm fast.

"Stay and see it out; if it could go on burning till Doomsday, I'd watch," said the old man, fiercely; "he used to like the Minster; he could tell fine tales about the bells, could Stephen. But he is gone, and Lilias is gone. Every body is dead and gone. I'm alone; a miserable old man."

He went maundering on to himself about paving the Minster with gold pieces.

"I could do it, I could do it, mind you," he cried, shaking my arm angrily, as if I had contradicted him. "If I had an enemy—but nobody hates poor old Paul—if I had an enemy, I would build him his house with my money, and if it did not drag him down to hell, the curse is off it. Oh, every body has forgotten but me, and I know every thing."

I did not strive with him any longer, but let him guide me where he would, feeling that I might be rather a protection to him; for of late he went very shabbily clad, and the street boys called after him derisively. He enjoyed the sight intensely; and when, toward midnight, the wind changed, and the flames sank, he began to cry with disappointment.

During the height of the excitement the bitterness of the night had not been felt, but now I shivered in every limb, and begged Paul to let me see him safe home. But this he sturdily refused, and I left him wandering about the Close in the cold and darkness. He was going to keep a vigil, he said.

It was a strange sight to watch the gray, pale dawn creeping over the skeleton tower the morning after the fire, its empty windows yawning like cavernous mouths, and then the yellow sunshine stealing through the space, and the blue sky visible where yesterday had hung the fine old bells. How we should miss them! How silent for many a day would be the grand Minster aisles!

Jean and I went out together to look at the ruins before my mother awoke, but we found that the doors were strictly guarded, and that nobody was permitted to enter. On the grass in the Close lay many huge blackened beams which had been brought from the interior of the building, and already groups of people, who had come thither on the same errand as ourselves, were enunciating their opinions and suspicions as to the origin of the disaster. The Dean was giving directions to the workmen; and Mr. Withers, in a state of intense excitement, was jerking to and fro, and exchanging a word with every body.

"Paul Fenton has been here all night," said he to me; "he is madder than ever; some one should look after him."

The old man was poking about among the charred timber, as if searching for the ashes of the demons that he fancied he saw in the fire. I went and spoke to him, but he vouchsafed me no answer. At length a workman rudely ordered him off, and he tottered out at the gate, wagging his poor old head and waving his arm triumphantly. I followed to have a word with him, and said I feared he would have caught cold.

"Oh no, Miss Kathie, I never felt better in my life—

never better. You must come and see me; I have something for you," he replied, distinctly. This invitation astonished me, for since Lilias's death none of us had been admitted within his doors; but I promised to go.

"Do not forget. You loved Lilias, and I want to talk about her to you."

Could he have discovered Stephen's falsehood to her? I thought.

That afternoon he sent a message for me to go immediately to his house, and, leaving the children under Jean's care, I went. I found him looking alert and brisk, with many of his daughter's little personal possessions about him; among the rest, the antique casket of trinkets which she had once shown to me. He had collected them together for the purpose of giving them to me.

"She wished you to have them, but I could not make up my mind to part with them before," said he, moving his wrinkled hand tremulously from one thing to the other. "You see they were all she left me to remind me of her; but take them away now: I can't bear to think any body else may handle them."

I remonstrated, and said he should keep them.

"No, they are yours," was the reply. "I could give you my money, but I won't, for you loved her; but I *could* give you more money than would build up the Minster again. Yes, it is not money that maketh rich, for I am a very poor, miserable old man." His wits were astray again, and his blank eyes wandered up and down the wall.

The woman who kept his house came in. "Master has doubted about those things of poor Miss Lilias's often; I hope he's going to let you have them now, Miss Brande," said she, addressing herself to me. "He will be quieter in his mind when they are out of his sight, for he has them always about, and talks as if they could answer him. He gets weaker and less himself every day, I think."

Paul paid no further attention to either of us, so I went away, not, however, attending to what he had mentioned about Lilias's trinkets, for they were things of value, and very probably on the morrow his generous act would give him a fit of remorse—at least so I thought. But the same evening the housekeeper brought a box containing the most costly things, and said her master had bid her tell me that they were mine, and could do me no harm. So the whole, unopened, was locked up in the hutch, and there left in the anticipation that before the week was out Paul would send for it again.

Two days later the old man was found dead in his bed. He had no relatives or friends, and the only person really acquainted with his affairs was an attorney, his contemporary in age, who had ceased to practice many years. This person produced Paul's will. It astonished all Eversley by the munificence of its bequests, for the rumors as to his enormous wealth were verified by them. Every charitable foundation in the city profited extensively, as also did others in distant parts of the kingdom. This will had been executed long before the death of Lilias, but nothing was left to her except the curious and valuable contents of the house in which they lived. These, by a recent codicil, were bequeathed to Kathie and Jean Brande, to be equally shared between them. Paul was buried in the Minster at the cost of the city, and a fine marble monument was erected over him, which records, not his virtues, but his rich bequests, so that future generations may gaze, and be edified as by the labors of a saint. His money did good at last.

LXXIV.

After the night of the fire, both Jean and I observed in our mother a tremulous nervousness which had never appeared in her before; for, even in the midst of pain and affliction, she had always hitherto been mentally clear and col-

lected. I proposed one evening to send for our kind Dr. Riley, but to this she objected, saying that she should be well on the morrow; and she tried early to compose herself to rest.

I could not be still that night: my head did not once press its pillow. An unaccountable sense of depression hung about me—a presentiment of coming sorrow. For a long, long time I sat looking out at the Minster, whose skeleton tower showed more ghastly in the moonlight than in the midday glare. There was a mournful wail in the March wind that swayed the tall poplars in the Close, and made them reel before its steady sweep. Black clouds scudded wildly over the moon at intervals, and made of all a dreary, eerie darkness.

My life passed in review before me through that restless night: its gray, unnatural childhood, its glorious spring of youth and love, and now its deep, still, eventless calm, soon to be broken by inroads of fresh grief. I remembered all my mother's love and forbearance, patience and courage—all that she had done and endured for us since we were children. My thoughts were very sad, and though I wept abundantly, my heart was not eased. Just when the dawn began to break I crept softly into my mother's room, and sat down by the bedside, with my Bible on my lap, waiting till the coming light should enable me to read it.

Presently the curtain was put aside; my mother saw me, and smiled. "I thought you were there, Kathie," she said, in a voice almost inaudible. "Speak low, darling, not to wake little Jean."

Oh! how thickly my heart beat as I stood holding her gentle hand in my trembling fingers.

"Kathie, write to Stephen—I should dearly like to see him; and write to Isabel too; but I fear *she* is too far away."

"Oh, my mother!"

"Hush, Kathie. You have been a good daughter to me, and God will reward you. I am not leaving you alone, darling; 'my right hand' must remember that. I ought not to

have let you sacrifice yourself for Stephen, and then again for me. Oh, Kathie, it has always been for you to give up to others."

I put my arms round her neck; speak I could not: the swelling in my throat almost choked me. Yet then I might not give way to my grief: it would have been too cruel to her. She let me lay her down again on her pillows, but still kept my hand. The tears would come. "There may yet be time to see them both," she murmured, wearily, thinking of her absent children. I assented, and kissed her to hide my tears. Oh, my darling mother, were you to leave me, then I should indeed be alone. It was hard to take her so soon after that other parting, which had torn my heart in twain. There was need to bear in mind whose will it was that I should be thus bereft, to keep me from murmuring and resentment.

I wrote the letters to my brother and Isabel that morning, sitting in my mother's room, while Jean taught the children in the west parlor. After that day they came no more for a time. Dr. Riley gave us no encouragement to hope, and we awaited this sad separation with what strength we could.

Nothing but her passionate love for our mother enabled Jean to restrain her sorrow when she saw what was coming: she wept herself weary, and at evening I made her lie down on my bed. Half an hour after I went in to look at her: she slept with a smile on her lips, though her eyelashes were still wet with tears. Oh, happy heart of youth, to which all sorrow is but April storm.

My mother's glance followed me as I came and went from the other room, and she held out her hand feebly to grasp mine. Her strength was now failing fast; her clear, brown eyes had grown dull, and there was a blind look about them that I had never seen before. She asked if Jean slept. I nodded, not daring to trust myself to speak. I longed to burst forth into crying. Ann was in the room, setting things

in order; her presence helped me to control myself; and by the time she had finished and was gone, the mist had cleared from my vision, and the rising in my throat was gulped down. My mother looked at me and sighed.

"Why do you sigh mother?" I asked.

"Oh, Kathie, I was thinking of what should have been." I understood her to refer to Mr. Mayne. "I was thinking of the bright little girl who came home to me from Crofton, eight years ago, and poured out her whole heart full of happiness before her mother."

"Well, mother, she is here still."

"But how changed! Oh, my child, my Kathie, if I had trusted our to-morrow in God's hand, your life might have been happier than it is."

"You mean about poor Stephen? It was right to do what we did. I have been happier than I could have been with such a duty neglected."

"*Happy*, Kathie! No, you have not been happy: you have only been *still*."

"That is all past, mother; let us forget it."

Her fingers tightened convulsively round mine as she spoke; her eyes glittered in the uncertain light; as for mine, the tears fell like rain in pity for those old sufferings. When my mother next spoke, it was of Jean. "You will be with her until you give her to Francis Maynard. She will sorrow; but comfort soon comes to happy natures like hers. I have no fear for little Jean; but my heart aches often for Isabel. Oh, if I knew how all is with her!"

In the gray early morning I began to read to her from the Bible, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." There was quiet and soothing in these words, which never show their deep significance till the time of need comes, and then they seem to have been written expressly for each repining and stricken heart, upon whose soreness they are shed like balm of Heaven.

Two days elapsed before Stephen's arrival, though he had obeyed the summons immediately. The shock to him was violent, being totally unlooked for. It was pitiful to see the late and useless tears he shed in repentance for former unkindness, and to hear the protestations of steadiness and amendment that he offered as atonement. And some consolation they were, for our mother loved him fondly.

Anxiously did we now look for Isabel's coming, or for some communication from her, but none arrived; and on the fourth day after Stephen's appearance, it being the Sabbath, my mother died. She died calmly, without pain, in perfect peace —the natural end of a life like hers.

Oh, my mother, never fell sorrow on me so heavily as it fell that day. Never had the old house under the shadow of the Minster looked so gloomy or so desolate. And when her place was empty, when we went and came without a call from that familiar voice, how long, how weary seemed the bright spring days — how profitless my daily drudgery! Henceforth there was but myself to work for, and I began to learn how those feel who are alone in the world.

LXXV.

Jean's marriage was necessarily deferred, but it took place during the following August. I put off my mourning for the day, and went to church with my darling. Happy and sweet she looked. It was a shame in me crying as I did, but I could not forbear. It was selfish, perhaps; but I remembered that I was giving up my last home-friend, and it almost broke my heart to see her go. Many of the old, desolate, childish thoughts came surging up in my memory; the times when I was weak and ailing, and fancied myself less beloved than the others, and wished bitterly that I were dead. And at night, when Jean and Francis were gone, and I was alone in the west parlor, the poplars rustling without like a heavy shower of rain, the wind whistling, and my sol-

itary shadow wavering ghost-like on the wall, I laid down my face on my arms and wept long and passionately. It was wrong, and weak, and foolish, I know, but then I was *alone;* and far up through the vista of life—far up as I could see—I must still be alone; the reality was yet new to me, and very, very sad.

It was well for me that there were more changes to come—that I was obliged to bestir myself in the things of every-day life.

Soon after my mother's death I had received notice that the house must be given up in autumn, as Percie Court, and the other old buildings so near the Minster, were to be pulled down for the improvement of the neighborhood.

Jean's marriage over, and "all the world before me where to choose," I gave up my school, and disposed of the furniture. Stephen's remaining debts had been paid off entirely by my share of Paul Fenton's bequest; and my brother offered me a home in his house, thinking that it might be advantageous for all parties, as I could attend to the children, and assist his ailing wife.

Under these circumstances, it was necessary that Ann and I should part. One evening she opened the subject herself when she brought in my tea.

I had drawn up to the fire—I always had a fire now for companionship. She made a pause, elevated her nose into the air, as if she scented something a long way, and stood waiting until I shut up my book, which was immediately done when I saw she had a communication to make. She looked very resolute, but the kindly sharpness of her eyes was obscured by a tear.

"Miss Kathie, I've been thinking that Thursday come a week, you will have no need of me," she began, interrogatively.

"No, Ann. I am going out into the world, rather late in life, to seek my fortune," said I, with an effort of cheerfulness.

She had been a faithful, attached servant, and I was grieved to part with her; but I knew what had been intended all along.

Hastily wiping her eyes, she drew up her little square figure to its utmost height, and advanced into the broad firelight to make a declaration of which she seemed very proud indeed.

"I thought, Miss Kathie, your housekeeping being give up, I should have to leave; and sorry I am, for a better mistress doesn't breathe; but being so, and not to be helped, Joe and me has made up our minds to be married. There's nothing to prevent it. Joe *is* younger than me, but that makes no odds. If he doesn't mind it, I needn't."

"Certainly not, Ann: I hope you will be happy; I am sure you deserve it."

"That's what Joe says, Miss Kathie; and I make no doubt that I shall, for he is a very staid, likely young man. I may have troubles—all of us has—but it's easy working for one's own. Then one isn't alone in one's old age. Families brings cares, but there's many a care comes saddled with a blessing, say I."

"And when do you intend being married, Ann?"

"Well, Miss Kathie, the day you go away. You know I've no parents; and as Joe has a little house all ready to take me to, and not to leave you till the last, it would just suit."

I thanked her for her consideration, which she begged me not to name, as a day earlier or later made no difference in the world.

This settled, there only remained for me to take my leave of those graves in St. Mark's church-yard—already my mother's was green—to bid good-by to my friends and pupils in the Minster Close, and to Miss Bootle at the Old Maids' Hospital. The latter I found in such ecstatic mood over Charlie that I am not certain whether she understood the

purport of my visit: she could talk about nothing except that her cat had caught fifteen mice in ten days, and that he was in such high favor in the spinster community as to be continually invited out to milk and muffin, with the chance of game in closets.

"I hope you will succeed, Kathie, whatever you are intending to try," said she, kissing me at the door; "but, wherever you go, I'm sure you will never meet a cleverer cat than my Charlie."

Of course her Charlie was more important to her than all my affairs—our own little matters are to us dearer than any thing relating to other people—but I wished she had given me a kinder farewell: it is chilling to find an old friend bent on discoursing of a cat when you go to bid a long, perhaps a last good-by. And so the old life ended.

LXXVI.

Little Ann was gone; all the furniture was gone; the empty rooms echoed ghostly. There was nothing more to do but for me to go too, and yet I lingered. This had been home for six-and-twenty years. I had been born in this old house. Here my sickly childhood wore painfully away; here, in the painted window, had I sat dreaming or eagerly conning a romance; up in my closet-chamber, with God and the white Minster towers for sole witnesses, had the hopeful visions of girlish days gone over, and made way for the lagging footsteps of those waiting years which were ended too. Here had my father died, my two young brothers, and my darling mother. Hence Isabel had gone in her childish loveliness, Jean in her bridal beauty, and Stephen in his vain, wasteful youth. Not a bird in the old nest but me.

I went through every room with a melancholy certainty that these sacred home-scenes would behold me no more. In my closet I stood to take one last gaze at the towers in the sunshine; then fell on my knees by the window, and wept

and prayed. There was none to see my agony—none to bid me be resigned or comforted. As in every other great crisis of my life, I had to act alone. After a while I went down stairs again: there was a ray of evening purple through the stained window, making its first touch on the broad ledge. I sat down there and watched the colors come out upon the walls, the steps, and the banisters. When they were at their brightest, I went away through the stone hall and out into the shady court, with confused echoes of old days ringing in my ears, and blinding tears in my eyes.

No longer a *first* object to any one; without a hearth by which I could claim a seat; free to work, and free to wander where I would—so accustomed had I been to loving service, that my liberty was now my burden.

"Let me put a brave face on my fortunes," said I, by way of raising my spirits. And thus I departed from Eversley, to return to it no more for years.

LXXVII.

When any person has reached the points of time and experience when peace and quietness have come to be regarded as the chief blessings in life, to be suddenly domesticated in a house with twins is, I humbly submit, a trial of Christian patience and charity. My sister-in-law's babies seemed to pervade the whole establishment; if they were not to be met taking an airing alternately on the staircase, in the grasp of a short, clumsily-built little girl, who was nearly overbalanced by their weight, a stormy chorus of cries was to be heard from the nursery. The room appropriated to my use was under the roof, with a square foot of window opening on the tiles, which gave a limited prospect of the sky, and nothing else. The twins were immediately below, so that retreat there was none.

Stephen had formerly described Flora to me as a bit of genuine, unspoiled nature, and therefore my expectations were

moderate. On my arrival I found her sitting in state in a small, gaudily-furnished drawing-room, and having been prepared to see a severely punctilious, orderly person, she received me with a nervous ceremoniousness which made her manner positively unkind; she seemed to be entering her protest at once against any interference in her domestic arrangements, or, rather, disarrangements. My first sentiment was one of regret that I had come to Stephen's house at all. Flora did not make me welcome, and this was not wonderful; for Stephen had been in the habit of continually proposing me as a model to his negligent young wife, and she resented it, naturally enough.

She was a rather pretty little person, with a nice figure and small features; but she dressed in such a tawdry style, and was so indolent and self-indulgent, that her youthful bloom was fast fading, and a querulous, tired expression succeeding to it. Any useful occupation she regarded as quite beneath her, considering the fortune that she had brought Stephen; so Jemima—Jemmy she was called for short—managed, or mismanaged, the twins, and two other servants ruled the house. It was very uncomfortable, disorderly, and irregular in consequence; and though Stephen found fault daily, Flora resigned herself to her novel or her worsted parrot after it with perfect equanimity. She imagined herself in delicate health, whereas all she needed was fresh air and wholesome exercise. It was impossible to stir her from her easy-chair or her sofa for a walk. She occasionally went out shopping, and brought home some frippery for the decoration of her own little person, or a new gewgaw for her crowded toy drawing-room, but any thing further was beyond her strength. She had a good many complaints to pour into my ears concerning the trials and privations of her married life, in which it was impossible deeply to sympathize, because they were so entirely selfish. Instead of identifying herself with Stephen's interests, she set up a scheme of superior luxury for herself,

founded on that fortune of hers, to which she referred daily with pride. I found my brother much subdued in temper since his marriage. Flora was so blindly exacting and willfully perverse, that, no doubt, he was glad to let her have her own way for quietness' sake. If he denied her extravagant whims, she would fret and sulk for two or three days together, taking intervals of rest during his absence from the house, that she might look all the sourer when he came in. Neither was strong enough or persistent enough to rule the other, so that their contentions were perpetually renewed, and very uneasy I felt in the midst of them.

I made my work presently with the twins, which were sometimes quite too much for Jemmy. Flora never attended to them except in a fine, ladylike way, so that it was marvelous they fared as well as they did. Jemmy did not resent my intrusion in her domains, but was glad, indeed, of help. She was a funny little creature, slightly deformed, with an intelligent, shrewd face, full of kindness. The twins knew and liked her quite as well, if not better, than their mother. She used to turn them, all shining with soap and friction, into their respective cots every night, and then sit down and *talk* them to sleep. She told long, rambling histories, half romance, half fairy-tale, coined, I believe, in her own brain, for she could not read. She must have studied elocution under a course of provincial Methodist preachers, for her voice had the monotonous, impressive drawl peculiar to those persons, and it had a truly lulling, sedative effect. Minnie and and Steenie slept like tops under it.

But my residence under Stephen's roof was not destined to be of long continuance. Something of order and regularity I contrived to introduce; but Flora, though she would do nothing herself, was extremely tenacious of her prerogatives as mistress of the house, and said the servants respected my orders more than they did hers. She also alluded to her fortune, and to what she was pleased to designate my beggary, in a

very disagreeable manner. In short, I found that my position there could never be any thing but that of the poor relation, and I did not like it; therefore, never having been averse to work in all her days, Kathie Brande made up her mind to face the world again, and eat bread of her own winning, which, even though coarse and scant, would not, at least, sting her palate with the bitter flavor of dependence. Stephen was vexed at my resolve, and made Flora cry by threatening to emigrate—a threat which only made me hasten my departure, lest it should become a bone of contention between the two.

LXXVIII.

Willingly would I pass over the painful months of striving with fortune for mere bread to eat that followed this change; but why slur over the bitter experience that has its thousand counterparts in that great London this very day? My lodging was one little room, very clean and airy, with a view over the house-tops as far as the smoke would suffer me to see; glimpses of greenness showed among the labyrinth here and there; and even to the house in which I was a lodger there was attached a strip of garden as large and as fresh as that in Percie Court.

I applied myself with a good heart to my new life, advertised for pupils, and then began, in the interval of waiting for them, to embellish my abode. New bright chints converted my boxes into ottomans; a book-case was contrived on the top of the chest of drawers, where my few precious volumes, saved from the wrecks of home, made a decent show; my mother's picture hung over the mantel-piece; and the parting gifts of my scholars further served to set off my little den. At first, too, I always indulged myself with a tiny nosegay of flowers, but that I had soon to retrench. The expenses of the last few months at Eversley had not left me with much money in my purse, but I can not call to mind that any dread

of actual want ever occurred to me. If it had, I should have staved it off by reflecting that, with the will to work, none need starve. At all events, when my finances were reduced to something less than four pounds, I expended more than one at a bookseller's shop in the purchase of Mr. Mayne's last work, which I saw advertised in the columns of a newspaper lent to me, when it was a week old, by my landlady.

And that book was better than wine to me. It cheered and refreshed me as nothing else could have done. Why might I not follow him in thought still, and take pride and pleasure in his success? It was dear to me as ever; though we might never more meet as friends, it was not surely wrong to remember that once we had loved. The tone of this book was deeper, higher, purer, stronger—his great heart was made manifest in it. I loved that book, I shall always love it. To my own loneliness it brought life; it brought more: it brought the assurance that Felix was happy.

For a week or two I was eminently content in my new abode; I read, wrote, sewed, and walked out. Stephen came to see me, and Jemmy brought the twins in a basket-carriage; but soon I discovered that, with so light a purse, my occupations ought to be more profitable.

"*N'importe!*" said I to myself, fearlessly, "you are alone; nobody depends on you for bread, and your wants are easily satisfied."

So, indeed, they were; but, not being ethereal enough to exist on *n'importe*, I made strenuous researches after pupils. At last, after many personal applications, repulses, and failures, I met with a family who would give fifteen pounds annually for the instruction of two little girls in English, music, and any minor accomplishments that I might choose to throw in for the money. I accepted the post with thanks, and was taught to feel myself extremely fortunate in having got it, for my deficiencies in the matter of general accomplishments debarred me from obtaining any thing else. By rights, I

could claim nothing beyond a decent acquaintance with my own language, with history, geography, and the elementary branches of education; and I found that a governess was expected to be proficient in various arts and sciences; to be, in short, a universal teacher. I always have had a strong desire to see one of those ladies who know all the 'ologies, modern languages, with Greek and Latin for boys, music and singing without a master, drawing in various styles, dancing and deportment; but hitherto my wish has not been gratified, and I am beginning to think them fabulous, notwithstanding the advertisements to the contrary. This engagement was for three hours daily; but after several contemptuous rejections of my services, and one offer that I should accept the post of nurse to a delicate boy, I determined to find some other additional means of subsistence, as it was clear I could not live on fifteen pounds paid half yearly. I did any thing—embroidery, worsted-work, bead-work, and copying work for my landlady's brother, an attorney—that paid the best; I *lived*, in short, and necessity had quickened me out of the torpor of sorrow and ease. I was not unhappy; perhaps having my faculties on the stretch was good for me; there have been times when, surrounded with far more earthly goods and better prospects, I was less content.

LXXIX.

Whenever I come in sight of a great sorrow—either a crisis in my own life or in that of those dear to me—it seems as if my pen approached it with slow reluctance. There is a deep pathos in the faces of those pale phantoms which haunt the shores of the waters of life, as if they would say, "Bless us; we have been blessed to you." They are sacred—to be spoken of gently, not with wild cries or ear-splitting exclamations.

It was dark night; the rain pattered against the window, the wind howled and whistled fitfully through the deserted

streets. I had not lit my candle, but sat by the red light of the fire, watching the faces that glowed in it. I often passed half an hour thus, thinking, but not moodily, on the scenes which memory conjured up in those still and lonely days. It seemed long, very long, since I had lost home and home-happiness. I had ceased to count the days when I had been alienated from love and hope. I lived in perpetual shadow; not beneath the black cloud of present agony, but in the undisturbed quiet and gloom of twilight, after the effulgence and reflection of the sun have gone down and left a solemn gray silence on the spirit of mortality. The stream of existence poured on with me smoothly; I floated companionless: old friends rode proudly on its waves far out of my track. Perhaps, I thought, they are some of them freighted with far deeper woe, careering majestically on the full, free tide, than I, drifting slowly before the breeze in the shadow of the bank.

No friendly face had I seen for many months, except sometimes the fire gave them to my eye, and that was why I sat by it so often idle. Sometimes I wondered if, within that great city, there were many who from day to day, and week to week, heard the tone of no loving voice; and if there were, how they bore it. Whether they brooded in solitude till sense failed, or whether they went out into the streets and made themselves friends of strangers, or patiently bore the yoke till time lightened it, or sought a strength greater than their own to enable them to cast it off.

It was dark night; wind and rain reveling without; I and my companion, the fire, which has a friendly face at all times, within. I bent down close toward it, for it was very cold, and spread my hands to its warmth, shivering, as steps passed to and fro in the street, for all who were abroad in such a storm. I had speculated on the tone of the footsteps until to each I had assigned a meaning. When they sprang lightly and clearly from the ground, it seemed that the form

must be young, the spirit that swayed it buoyant, and the will that guided it free; when they pressed steadily forward, I thought that worldly cares had descended, but not yet heart-sorrows; when they were faint and wavering, hurrying and lingering by turns, I knew that the showers of affliction were falling, and that the wayfarer hesitated whether to seek shelter from their merciless fury or to abide them patiently; when they were heavy and irregular, I knew that passion and desperation were hurrying them on in their flight from swift pursuing thought. Many steps there were that went by with the same plodding, echoless tramp: they had the tone of the common herd whose portion is labor, who have no time to live inwardly, whose first and last thought is how they shall extract bread from the stones around them to sustain life from day to day.

One step there was with a purpose in it: a step that came inevitably, fair or foul, fast-day or festival — sharp, quick, sudden; a step I listened for every day and every night; checked rarely at the door of my dwelling, but pausing at others, when the street was roused from its lethargy by the familiar double rap, and heads appeared at doors and windows to watch the transit of the postman. The bearer of good and evil tidings—Death's messenger sometimes, and sometimes Love's; but for that his step neither lagged nor hastened. The postman to our street was a small, weather-beaten man, short and surly in his answers to all queries, and very impatient indeed if his postage were not instantly forthcoming. We used to meet in the mornings and exchange a nod as I went to my teaching; and at night he was my clock, for after he had gone by it was time to wrap up work, and idle for half an hour. But on this particular night a listless fit had overtaken me; I wished I had a friend to come in and lighten the stillness of my solitary evening with a little talk; so it came to pass that three hours went over, post time came, and I was still doing nothing—nothing but

thinking and wishing. Nine o'clock struck, and, five minutes after, came the steady tramp; I raised the blind and looked out into the street: there was the postman on the opposite side of the way, with his oil-skin cape shining with rain and lamplight, and his hat down over his brows. He crossed to our door, and gave that double rap which, at one time or other, has quickened all our pulses.

The servant was a long while in going to the door, but at last she scurried along the passage and opened it. It clashed to again immediately, and she went back, singing, to her kitchen. I felt a little shade of disappointment, for I had hoped there might be a letter for me from Jean or from somebody else. I am one of those people who feel personally obliged to the postman when he brings me any thing, and who, when I am disappointed, bear an unreasonable animosity, as if he had defrauded me of my due.

Think of the monotony of a life in which a letter from nobody in particular would be felt as a pleasant incident! Such would it have been to me many a time during those months which followed my departure from Eversley. But for that night my chance seemed gone; so I rose up, and gave the fire a poke, saying, in a kind of desperation, "Well, then, I will read for half an hour."

I got down that old commonplace-book which Felix had once left at our house, and began to read some of the extracts, with his comments attached. Here is one that struck me particularly:

"The night once come, our happiness, our unhappiness—it is all abolished, vanished, clean gone, a thing that has been—not of the slightest consequence. But our Work—behold, that is not abolished, that has not vanished. Our Work—behold, that remains, or the want of it remains; and that is now the sole question with us for evermore.

"What hast thou done—and how?"

"Where is thy work? Swift! out with it! Let us see thy Work."

And another from the same writer:

"In a valiant suffering for others, not in a slothful making others suffer for us, did nobleness ever lie. The chief of men is he who stands in the van of men, fronting the peril which frightens back all others; which, if it be not vanquished, will devour the others. Every noble crown is, and on earth will forever be, a crown of thorns."

Immediately below followed these lines from Byron's poem of "Don Juan:"

"words are things, and a small drop of ink
Falling, like dew, upon a thought, produces
That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think."

Then came a short dissertation on this text, touching the responsibility of authorship: Like seed sown at the wayside are the principles and sentiments scattered by the whim or the earnest of men of letters. There is no saying who will pick them up, or to what use they may be put; whether they will strengthen like a moral tonic, or pervert and warp like a poisonous draft; whether they will encourage to the pursuit of true nobleness, or turn waverers back with a sneering surety to their own weak devices.

While I was thinking on this rather vaguely and wearily, the door opened, the stout Irish servant entered, and laid a letter before me.

"A letter, m'm, just come, post-paid," said she, and walked out again.

I snatched at it eagerly, not very well pleased that it had been kept for a ten minutes' examination in the lower regions. It was a foreign letter, in a strange handwriting. It was from Reginald Pompe, who wrote desiring me to go immediately to Paris to my sister Isabel. She had been confined, and nothing would satisfy her but seeing me. The vehemence of this desire absolutely retarded her recovery, Mr. Pompe wrote, and he begged me not to lose an hour in hastening to her side.

There is one advantage in not being encumbered with much worldly pelf: it is easy to go from place to place when no cares of friends or fortune have to be left behind. My possessions were packed in a single hour; and having notified the necessity of my immediate departure to my two pupils, I set off; and on the second day from that on which I received the summons, I was in Paris with Isabel.

LXXX.

I was taken up to my sister's room the moment I arrived, she was so impatient and restless for my coming. For the first ten minutes we were perfectly incoherent. I looked at Bella, and kissed her, and cried over her. A tall woman in a queer cap showed me the baby, all lace, and muslin, and pinkish countenance. I kissed and cried over that too. Perhaps nobody ever behaved in such a foolish way either before or since; but the young mother seemed quite to understand and participate.

She asked if I did not envy her.

Then the child was handed over to its mother, and the nurse went away with my bonnet and cloak; for as yet Isabel would not suffer me out of sight.

"I feel so safe with you there, Kathie," she said, pleasantly; so I sat down and listened to the "little language" the mother and child exchanged until my turn came again.

I had laid my hand on the counterpane, and Isabel put hers upon it, looking at me silently for some minutes through eyes swimming in tears.

"Oh, Kathie, the things that have been and gone since we two parted!" she said, with a sad smile, touching the sleeve of my black dress. She thought of our mother. "If I could only have seen her! But I was ill, and Reginald kept the news back lest it should make me worse."

She stooped over the child, and a great tear fell upon its face and woke it.

"That is unlucky," sighed she, wiping it off and kissing the little thing passionately. "Will thy mother ever bring thee aught but ill luck, my pet? Oh, Kathie, since I went away from home, I have often thought that I should have been better and happier if I had staid there. Hush! what nonsense am I talking! Could I be any where happier than with my darling?"

Then there was another interlude of petting and cooing, from which Isabel lifted her face with a forced smile.

"We shall all be happy now, and content: you will stay with me, and Reginald will—no matter. Kathie, I am so glad, so very glad, because of the child," and she began to weep aloud.

Judge if I was satisfied for poor, willful Isabel's happiness.

We had been together about an hour when Reginald Pompe came into his wife's room. If I had not known how plausible and gracious he could be, I might have been deceived into liking him, his manner to Isabel and the child was so gentle and caressing. My sister glanced at me triumphantly, as if she would call to my mind the warnings I had given her, and bid me observe how useless they were.

Reginald did not stay long; he could leave her to me without anxiety, he said.

Isabel seemed disappointed, and whispered that it was the first time she had seen him that day; but he had the ever-ready excuse of an engagement.

"And where are you going to-night, Reginald?" his wife asked, detaining him by the hand as he was turning away.

"To your beloved friend Anastasie: Milicent will be there, and your aunt Aurelia; have you any commands?"

"No, thank you."

At the name of Anastasie, Isabel's mouth twitched nervously, and she loosed her hold on her husband's hand. He paused irresolutely for a second or two, then kissed her, and bidding me take care of her, went out.

After this my sister did not seem disposed to talk any more, and asked me to draw the curtain to shade the firelight from her eyes.

Presently the nurse brought me some coffee, and told me that her mistress ought to take an hour's rest; she gave me a book, therefore, to beguile the time, and left me sitting by the bed. For some time there was complete silence, but one or two smothered sobs betrayed that Isabel did not sleep. I would not intrude on this sorrow which she wished to hide, but when she began whispering to the child, I came forward and spoke.

"Oh, Kathie, are you there? I fancied myself alone," she said, softly. "What o'clock is it—nearly ten?"

It was not yet nine.

"Are you sure the time-piece has not stopped?"

Yes; it had not stopped, I told her.

After lying very still for about ten minutes, she added, with a touch of her old, impatient manner, "It has seemed a long day, such a weary long day lying here; I shall be so glad to be up again. The lives we lead do not make us patient lingerers in sick-rooms, Kathie."

I glanced at the sleeping child beside her, thinking that *there* should be unfailing pleasure to her.

"I expected so much from him," she said, quietly, following the direction of my eyes. "I fancied he would bring back every thing; but it is not to be."

I did not ask what was "not to be," for she seemed to be thinking aloud, and I understood her to allude to Reginald.

"No, it is not to be," she repeated, caressing the child; "he will be proud of you, baby—he will love you; but he is tired of poor me. Oh, mother, why did I leave you?"

Ah, Isabel! you have met with troubles grievous to be borne, but the old house under the shadow of the Minster was not safe from sorrow; its quiet rooms had heard bitter sobs, and witnessed many an agony of tears. Pain and an-

guish would have found you out under that shelter as easily as in the wider world where your lot was cast.

"Kathie, you have told me nothing of yourself," said my sister after a long interval of silence; "come and sit where I can see you, and talk to me. Begin from the time you saw me in London before I was married, and tell me all."

"What is there to tell that you do not know already, Isabel? Stephen and Jean married—our mother dead."

"And has that been all your experience in these years, Kathie? Do not tell me that; there is something else that you keep back—something that has turned your brown hair gray, and made your eyes so deep and serious. Why not tell our troubles to each other? Are we not sisters? What of that Felix Mayne who came to our house the last Christmas I was at home? Did not the course of that true love run smooth?"

I shrank as if she had rudely touched an aching nerve. She stopped and looked at me wistfully.

"Oh, Kathie, I have pained you; forgive me, I did not mean it. We are half strangers to each other, are we not?"

"I don't feel strange with you, Isabel."

"Perhaps you think I am as willful and gay at heart as I was when you saw me last," she went on; "but there are things that change us. When I once told you that I was proud and happy to accept my fate, whatever Reginald should make it, I spoke truth. I would not change it for that of any woman I know. I can bear my husband's coldness, remembering how he once loved me, and how tender he can still be when he will. But I ought not to have married him, Kathie; it would have broken my heart to be separated from him then, but now I see that I am not clever or brilliant enough to retain him. I am only a cipher among the fascinating women here. They can amuse, while I only weary him. It is very sad for a wife, Kathie, when her husband is weary of her, and Reginald shows it. I hoped, when baby

came, he would love me a little more; but no: he leaves me all day for his friends."

Her great tears were falling on the child's face—a baptism of sorrow—but Isabel did not heed them.

"Mrs. Pompe says his neglect means nothing, and that I ought to support it with dignity; but I can not be dignified where I am not indifferent. Perhaps you can teach me a better consolation, Kathie."

I could only listen in silent pity.

"You can not? I must go on in the old way, then, opposing nothing but love to his harshness, for he has often said very cruel and bitter words to me in his anger; perhaps I may win him back at last. Oh! if he were ill, in pain, or in misery, who would serve him as I would? Not Anastasie—not any base friend of them all."

"That would they not, Isabel; your heart has led you to the best and safest revenge," I eagerly exclaimed, desirous to soothe her, and at the same time to check the complaints that perhaps, on the morrow, she would regret having uttered.

"He is with Anastasie now. She is a vain, clever woman, without beauty, but she is the fashion; and, to be first in her train, he sacrifices me. It is wicked and selfish, Kathie, and you can have no conception how it tortures me to know it. She is married too, and six months ago she was my friend—my *friend:* that woman who was to work me such misery and desolation! It makes me almost mad to think."

There was a passionate sparkle in her eyes for a minute or two, but it was soon quenched in tears. She bowed down her face over the sleeping child, and murmured, self-reproachfully, "Oh, my baby, he has given thee to me. I must, I will bear all for thy sake. Kathie, don't remember what I have said—I had no right to speak so; but seeing your dear old face opened my heart, and it was very full."

For a little while she wept violently; then, with the child

clasped close to her bosom, she fell into a weary, exhausted slumber, in which I left her; for the nurse came and whispered that excitement always made Madame ill, and that I had better not be there when she awoke.

It seemed as if poor Isabel's misery were achieved: none of my presentiments had gone farther than this. Reginald treated her with a careless negligence, which showed that her power over him was utterly gone. Sometimes he would come into her room for five minutes before hurrying out for his morning ride or visits, but quite as frequently he only sauntered in toward evening, when going to dress for dinner. He took a great deal of notice of the child, and set much store by its well-being, but did not testify any anxiety about its mother.

"You see I am nothing now, Kathie," she said, with a bitter smile, as he left the room after one of these visits—"less than nothing; he hummed one of Anastasie's songs to please baby."

It was not a very cheerful room in which Isabel lay. The house was between a court and garden, and her windows opened upon a mossy stone balcony overlooking the latter. Withered sprays of rose and jasmine, gay and fragrant in summer, twined about the carved balustrades, and beyond were a few great elm and lime trees, all bare and gray; the grass-plot was overgrown and sodden with melted snow, and in the middle a small ill-fed fountain kept up day and night a dreary tinkling of solitary water-drops.

On the first day that Isabel sat up she remarked that it was a melancholy place, and I proposed that she should change to the little salon which was on the same floor, and opened into a tiny conservatory. But she objected, without giving any reason. On this morning Milicent Pompe came with her mother to see the child, and staid a long while. Milicent would give us all the details of a splendid entertainment at Anastasie's house, though Isabel's want of interest almost trenched on rudeness.

"Anastasie was very brilliant and animated: what a truly fascinating woman she is!" exclaimed Milicent, enthusiastically: "it is not to be wondered at that she is so successful in society. Sibyl Froude, and some other English women who were there, looked as if they had been nourished on iced curds and whey, while her lips seemed never to have imbibed any thing cooler than sunbeams—'lips touched with fire:' she is witty and full of genius. Don't you admire her very much? By-the-by, she said she was coming to see you."

"I shall not receive her," replied Isabel, raising her eyes, bright with indignation. There was a momentary silence.

"Why not? you were the warmest friends a month or two since," said Milicent, apparently surprised at Isabel's sudden warmth.

"I will not receive her," repeated she, firmly: "Kathie, I depend on you to give orders that I am denied to every body."

Mrs. Pompe, up to this moment, had been engaged in a quarrel with the nurse as to whether the baby should or should not be subject to the quackeries of the Dean's lady. Hearing Isabel's resolute order, and being just at the same moment worsted in her contention with the nurse, she rejoined the little circle by the fire, not in the most placable mood, apparently.

"Stay, Miss Brande: let nothing be done rashly," she exclaimed, with a dignified gesture of the hand. "Now, Isabel, have you reflected how such an order will irritate my son? Of course you have not, or you could never have given it."

"Reginald can not desire me to receive persons who are disagreeable to me," answered my sister, flushing, and then turning as pale as marble.

"And, pray, why is Anastasie disagreeable to you? Have you any reason that you are prepared to assign for such an unaccountable freak? Three months ago you and Anastasie were inseparable—you almost lived together. How will this

sudden break look to the world? Reginald will never let you make him ridiculous with impunity. Let me advise you to think better of it."

Isabel looked proud and defiant: "My mind is made up," said she, quietly.

"Then you may also make it up to troublesome consequences. We all know what Reginald is," returned Milicent.

"It does not befit you to insinuate any thing against your brother," said Mrs. Pompe, angrily. "Why can not Isabel act like a woman of the world, instead of letting this paltry jealousy peep out? It is very insulting to Reginald, who only admires Anastasie because other men do. Let the fever-fit burn itself out; receive Anastasie as usual: she is a coquette, but she has not a bad heart."

"I will not see her; I will not be insulted by her false kindnesses. I wonder how you can expect that I should so debase myself," cried my sister, passionately.

Mrs. Pompe rose with great dignity, and said she was sorry to witness such headstrong folly; she could not interfere further, and Isabel must act as she pleased, and be responsible for the consequences. Milicent also gave a few words of advice, but, finding her sister-in-law not disposed to attend to them, she went her way with raised eyebrows and gloomy predictions.

LXXXI.

Once on that day, and twice on the succeeding, an elegant carriage drove into the court-yard with Anastasie, to make inquiries after her dear friend. On the last occasion she descended, and came to the *salon*, whither the nurse went to answer her questions. She left very reluctantly, after sending many messages of regret and condolence to Isabel.

It was during the evening of this day that Reginald came to his wife's apartment in a very angry and resentful state of mind. "Anastasie tells me she has been here three times,

and that she was not permitted to see you: how is that?" he began.

"I have seen no one yet; I can not bear to receive company."

"Nonsense! Affectation! Since when have you begun to consider Anastasie company?"

"Reginald, you know why I object to that woman; it is cruel of you to urge me to see her: you might leave me in peace, at least."

"Don't be a fool, Isabel!" said her husband, fiercely, while his iron fingers compressed her slender wrist. "How dare you say I am cruel? I will not suffer you to make me and yourself ridiculous. Anastasie will come again to-morrow; you will receive her without exhibiting any of this sudden aversion: you will obey me in this matter."

He looked menacingly at the poor, flushed face as he reiterated the last words.

"No, Reginald, I will not; you shall not make me: you have no right to compel me to obedience here, and you shall not," replied she, clenching her trembling hands, and meeting his eyes unflinchingly.

He returned her gaze coldly for a minute or two, then broke into a taunting laugh. That laugh seemed to torture her ten times more than his rage: she got up and walked rapidly through the room, then came back to her former place and asked him what it meant.

"It means this, Isabel," he continued, in an icy, passionless way, which showed he was uttering no vague threat—"it means that you may take your way, and I will take mine, as I offered to you once before. Kirklands is always ready to receive you—a very proper retreat for a rebellious wife. Paris suits me better. You can go whenever you feel equal to it: here I stay."

"And the child, Reginald?" said his wife, trying to be as proud and cold as he was.

"The child? Oh, of course, he will stay here too. I shall find a proper person to take charge of him."

"Oh, you *know* I can not leave *him!*" she murmured, clasping the child close to her heart, and turning her fever-lustred eyes on her husband.

"You not only *can*, but *shall*, if you do not come to reason speedily," returned he, in an accent of concentrated passion. "Do not treat me to any more of these scenes: they grow wearisome and uninteresting. It is of no use to cry; tears only waste your beauty. I know only one woman who can weep and look lovely at the same time."

"She is a better actress than I am!" cried Isabel, in a burst of sobs.

"Pshaw! I am not in the humor for a fit of sentimentals, neither shall I suffer you to make an *escalandre* for nothing. My mother, who is a sensible woman in her way, gave you some advice, and if you know what is good for you, you will act upon it; otherwise you may go to Kirklands. I don't care which."

"No, Reginald, I am sure you do not. It is many a long day since you cared for me. If you will let me take the boy, I will relieve you of my presence to-morrow," said Isabel, bitterly.

"But I will not let you take the boy; and, if you go to Kirklands, you go alone—*alone*, mind," retorted her husband, glancing at me. "Besides, you can not travel. What would every body say but that I was a barbarian, a monster, if I suffered you to attempt it? and that would gratify you, perhaps. Where is all that love you used to prate about, when you persist in thwarting me at every turn, and covering me with ridicule by your insane jealousy?"

The veins in his temples swelled like cords, and his eyes scintillated with passion. Isabel seemed to cower before them. She bore his gaze for a minute, then turned and hid her face among the cushions of the couch.

He laid his hand heavily on her shoulder, and went on in a hoarse voice: "This is the last time I will bear with your folly. If I find you in my way, I will send you out of it. Had it not been for the scandal of the thing, you should have gone the last time you tormented me. You imagine injuries where none are."

"Reginald, answer me!" exclaimed his wife, suddenly turning the full light of her passionate eyes upon him: "would you tamely endure that any man should pursue me as you pursue Anastasie? Would you let people talk of me as they do of her?"

"So far as love goes—yes, with sublime indifference; but, where my honor is concerned, it would be dangerous to provoke me. I would crush you—I would kill you as I would a worm, rather than that should be touched by you."

"Go away—leave me!" cried Isabel, in a choked voice. "Go!" She waved him off with her hand. He laughed in his icy, taunting way as he went to the door.

"Remember Anastasie," he said, in a warning tone. "I can trust you on every point but that. Good-night. Don't agitate yourself any more, for the boy's sake," and he went out.

Then Isabel crept on her knees to the child's cot, and laid her face down upon it, sobbing in agony.

"Oh, I wish I were dead! I wish I were dead!" she gasped again and again.

I drew near to soothe her, but she pushed me fiercely away.

"Let me alone! I want nobody—I only want to die," she said with bitterness, and, gathering the child into her arms, she sat on the ground weeping over and caressing it.

She was not fit to be left, and I was glad when the nurse, a woman of great firmness and kindness combined, came in and induced her to lie down in her bed.

The result of this scene was an attack of fever; and on

the morrow, when Anastasie came, Isabel was asleep under the influence of a sedative draft. The nurse had received her orders from her master; and while I was watching by my sister, she admitted a tall lady, whom she named to me as Madame's friend. She bent her head haughtily, and then with velvet foot crossed to the sofa, and sat down to wait Isabel's waking.

I watched her: she was exquisitely dressed, and her movements were slow, undulating, and graceful. She was young, but her countenance was displeasing; her mouth wide, and too full lipped; her eyes dark and fierce, yet stealthy; her brow low, and surmounted by thick braids of black hair; her skin was swarthy, but otherwise perfectly colorless. I imagined it a countenance that would light up with the glow of passion or the fury of jealous rage, but of tenderness, sweetness, or womanly modesty it had no trace. She sat supporting her chin on her hand, with her eyes on the carpet, motionless as a statue, for a considerable time; her lips slightly apart, and the small, even teeth within close set, as if she were keeping in a storm. Once Isabel moaned in her sleep, and in an instant Anastasie was beside the bed, holding back the curtains and gazing at her with her evil eyes. I could hear her drawing her breath heavily as she stood there; and never before nor since have I seen on any human face such an expression of malevolence as hers then wore.

While in this posture, Reginald's footstep was heard in the small salon adjoining. She lifted her head, listened a moment, and then went out to him. About ten minutes after her carriage drove out of the court-yard, and he came up into the room, and sharply asked the nurse if her mistress usually slept at that time of the day. The woman replied that Madame had had an attack of fever the night before, and that the physician had ordered her a sleeping draught. He gave one scrutinizing, baffled glance at Isabel, and then went away again. Anastasie came no more after this; and

for some reason, best known to himself, Reginald never alluded to the circumstances of this visit before his wife, though he took many unmistakable ways of testifying his anger and resentment. He came daily to see the child, but often departed without a word to Isabel; but her impetuosity broke out no more in reproaches, and her tears were shed in secret, if they were shed at all. As for Reginald, he was like ice or adamant to her.

LXXXII.

Colonel Longstaff and Aunt Aurelia were at this time residing in Paris. They had lived abroad entirely ever since their marriage. It was a pleasure to see how happy they were together: no young creatures in the first blush of their youth and love could have been more fondly attached than they were.

There was no cordiality, however, between the colonel and Reginald Pompe, so that a coldness had sprung up between their wives, and they rarely met except in society. I went alone to see my aunt, and she spoke to me with distress of the quarrels between Isabel and Reginald, which showed that they were known. Milicent had been her informant; Isabel had never complained to her, but always in public put a smiling face on her troubles.

When I had been in Paris about two months, Mrs. Pompe and her daughter returned to England—a change which delighted me, for her interference with the child and her lectures to Isabel were aggravating in the highest degree—were, indeed, scarcely to be endured in silence by the meekest spirited woman; how much less, then, by my sister. They never met without recrimination.

As spring advanced, Isabel returned to her ordinary manner of life. She visited a great deal, and I saw very little of her; the want of my care was past, and I proposed to leave her; to this, however, she was quite averse.

"I can not exist without excitement now," she said; "if I sit down to think, my brain is in a whirl as if I were going mad. But don't leave me, Kathie: I feel as if you were my safety."

So I remained.

When the weather became warm we went to a country villa about seven miles from Paris; Reginald staid behind. Occasionally he rode over to see the child, but for his wife he continued to exhibit the coldest indifference. If she were at home when he came, he spoke to her with bare civility; if she were absent, he never condescended to ask after her. His manner toward me was marked by a certain haughty politeness, and he once expressed his satisfaction that I staid with Isabel; but we cordially disliked each other notwithstanding.

Circumstances were, however, preparing to draw these two closer together for a short space. From the hour of his birth the child had been strong and healthy; the first few months of his life passed without any of those alarms which usually beset the cradles of only sons, who are, besides, heirs to great estates. For some unexplained reason, Reginald conceived a dislike for the nurse, whom Isabel altogether approved; she was discharged, and her place filled by a woman whom Anastasie recommended. From this day the child began to pine: he was seized with convulsive fits, and gradually dwindled away. Isabel, at first, refused to see this change; her heart was so bound up in his existence that she would not acknowledge cause for fear. The new nurse, a plausible, soft-spoken woman, encouraged this feeling of safety, and for several days the doctor was not sent for; at last, on my own responsibility, I dispatched a messenger both to him and Reginald, and they arrived together. The latter had not been over for ten days, and the change in the child's appearance greatly shocked him; the physician looked grave, and questioned the nurse so closely as to what she had given him in

the way of food and medicine, and whether she had had any accident with him, that she flew into a passion, gave up her situation, and left us the same day. Reginald poured out frantic reproaches against her, against his wife, against me, and finally returned to Paris to seek the first nurse and send her back, and at the same time to call in the best medical aid that could be procured.

Isabel's eyes were now opened. From the moment her husband left the house on his return to Paris she never suffered the child out of her arms; she held him in her lap, soothing his piteous wailings, weeping over him, praying for him passionately to God.

It was a bright August evening, warm, glowing; Nature was in her happiest mood. A soft breeze stirred in the tree-tops, and flower-odors loaded the balmy air. My sister bade me go and walk in the avenue to watch and give her warning of Reginald's return. It was pitiful to see the love that held by that frail little life; to hear the agony of supplication that broke from the mother's fevered lips, to be hushed by a fragment of a more humble prayer. In her trouble and anxiety the minutes seemed lengthened out into double hours. I went as she bade me, and staid near the gates looking out.

There were many carriages and horsemen coming out from Paris to the country to enjoy the air; but at length, among these leisurely pleasure-seekers, my stretched ear distinguished the hard gallop of a horse, and Reginald came in sight. He beckoned me to stay, and I did so. His face was white with excitement as he dismounted and asked me if the child lived. I replied that he did, and he strode hastily into the house and up to the room where Isabel was. I followed. The unhappy mother had laid the child upon the bed, and was kneeling beside him, with her face buried in her hands. He lay without motion—a little pale, worn image, breathing, and that was all. Reginald stood speechless for a second or

two, looking from one to the other; then he laid his hand heavily on his wife's shoulder, and bade her rise.

She gazed up pitifully in his face. "Hush, Regy, be still! don't you see?" she said, in a voice full of awe.

"Are we to stand like stocks and see him die?" demanded her husband, hoarsely. "Don't be a perverse, weak fool now; think of something to be done; there will be time enough for this driveling if—"

There was the noise of another arrival: the physician and the nurse.

"Nothing can save him now," I heard Isabel say, as the professionally stealthy foot entered the chamber.

In that moment the young life ebbed away. The mother's arm was round the child; her eyes fastened on his still features; her lips murmuring disjointed fragments of the prayers that we used to say when we were little ones at home together.

After a time she attempted to rise, but was so exhausted with suffering that she fainted, and would have fallen but that Reginald caught her in his arms. He carried her to another room, and laid her down on the couch.

"See to her, Kathie; do not leave her," he said to me, and then returned to the chamber where the dead child lay, and locked himself in. He had felt a very deep, natural love for it, and his grief was sincere, though angry and bitter. Probably it was not free from the sting of self-reproach.

Early the next morning he came out of the room, and, without seeing any one, rode off to Paris. I was with my sister, who had remained through the night in a state of lethargic insensibility; but the crush of the gravel under his horse's hoofs seemed to wake her out of her trance. She raised herself on her elbow, and looked round with an affrighted air.

"Who is that going away? Can it be Reginald?" she cried, wildly. "Oh, I am alone—quite, quite alone. My

little child, my poor little baby is taken from me. O God, be merciful, and take me too. Why can not I die and be at rest?" The passionate complaint died in an inarticulate murmur.

I tried to speak to her of the angel she had in heaven—her early gathered darling; but her sore heart would not hearken.

"Oh, Kathie, you can not know, for you have never felt it, how that tender thing was knit to my very soul," she said, plaintively. "He was my only one, and I did so count on him to bring back Reginald to me. But now that tie is broken, and my hope with it. Why can not I close my eyes, and open them no more on this miserable world?"

If death came at our first impatient call, how many of us would live out our days?

Toward night Reginald returned, and saw his wife for a few minutes. During the four days that intervened before the child's funeral, he always rode to Paris early, and came back at dusk. Immediately after it took place he gave orders for our removal altogether; and in the village churchyard he seemed to leave, not his son's dust only, but his memory, for I never afterward heard him utter his name. His grief and disappointment were intense: he sought his consolation with Anastasie.

And poor Isabel! It is only a mother's heart that can tell the long soreness that follows the rending away of those tender ties. For months she mourned as one without hope; her beauty waned, her spirit seemed utterly broken and subdued. Then there came a sudden and total change. She threw off all symbols of her loss, avoided solitude, and plunged more recklessly than ever into the frivolities and extravagances of the society in the midst of which she lived. When I remonstrated with her, she answered me, "Kathie, if I sit any longer brooding over my troubles I shall go mad. Sometimes I think I am almost half mad already."

LXXXIII.

I like to walk in the crowded thoroughfares and public resorts of a great city, and to watch the quaint faces and figures pass to and fro in the living panorama. When the mood contemplative is not on me, the noise and bustle stir my blood, and make me wish that I had been of stronger frame and character; that, instead of a passive on-looker, I might have been an actor in the whirling vortex of life. Many an hour did I pass at this time in exploring the tortuous, narrow streets of the ancient city, the gay boulevards and quieter faubourgs.

I have been told that Paris is now so much improved in every part that I should scarcely know it again, and I should not refer to these rambles but for a particular incident which then occurred. I had entered a jeweler's shop to do some trifling commission for my sister, and was waiting to be attended to when a lady came in. She was English, from her face; its features I can not describe, but it had sweetness, innocence, and modesty; youth, pure eyes, delicate bloom, and cheerfulness; it was one of those faces which, seen among strangers, touch us, we know not why; we do not forget them, though we have no association with them, and no name for their possessors. My remembrance of this bright face is no blind remembrance, however; it burnt itself a clear image on my memory amid a haze of stormy emotions, which could not dim its sunshine or impair its grace. She was alone, buying a child's coral, and she made a long difficulty over her choice; she also looked often to the doorway, as if expecting to be joined by some one. I was speaking to one of the men when I heard a step enter behind me, and a pleasant English voice said, "You are here at last, Felix."

There was no need for me to listen breathless for who should answer; did not that footfall wake every tumultuous echo in my heart? A deadly faintness crept over me, and I

leaned against the counter for support; it was only for an instant, but into that instant seemed compressed the essence of every agony that I had ever known. I staggered rather than walked out of the shop, with no thought but how I should get away, lest I should see Felix; I lost myself in a maze of streets, and then longed to go back to see if he were changed; to learn—if learn I could from look or tone—how dear was that beautiful young wife whose face had attracted me so much.

It was evil and wicked to feel as I felt for a few minutes. I tried to think that perhaps Felix did not love her as he had loved me; that she was cold, or proud, or passionate, or had some failing that would make him remember Kathie with regret. It was wrong—I know it was; I have nothing to plead in extenuation; it was the gasping cry of love that I thought was dead, or at least forever silent in my quiet heart.

I walked miles that day trying to leave thought and memory behind, but they clung to me like a poisoned garment. I might as well have tried to escape my gliding shadow. All that evening I spent alone. How, it matters not. On the morrow, calm fell on me again—the dead calm of passive endurance. Had I not seen them, this corruption of my nature had lain unstirred. But such rencounters might occur again; was this storm of evil passion to lie seething in my heart, ready at any hour to lay it waste? I tried to think it down. Felix must love that fair young thing better than ever he had loved me; she must be so much dearer, as the true wife is, than the first fancy that men have. Still some hushed corner in his heart there *might* be sacred to the love of his youth: it quieted me to hope so, weak as it was.

Twice again I met them, but in the interval I had communed with rebellious thought and mastered it. Perhaps my pulse quickened, but it was only a passing thrill. I was unrecognized, and it was best so; I could not have trusted myself in a cool, friendly greeting.

LXXXIV.

For some time past Reginald had placed certain restrictions on the household expenses, which led me to suspect that he had had severe losses at play, or else that some other drain on his purse was begun. Isabel submitted without a word to the limit placed on her expenses; she would have welcomed utter poverty if it could have given her back her husband's love. I do not think that if he had been one of the best men in the universe she could have maintained for him throughout a more complete devotion; and aggrieved as she had been, and was daily, she would have been ready always to forgive him. I could scarcely sympathize with this. Mine was a slower nature; and all impressions, whether for good or ill, were deep and abiding; one look of contempt, one word of angry insult would have frozen my heart forever.

One morning, when Isabel and I were sitting under the trees in the garden, each with a book, to which neither was paying much attention, Reginald came suddenly from the house in a state of violent excitement, and told us that preparations were to be made for an immediate return to England. He was sick of Paris, and longed to get out of it, he said. Isabel asked whither we were to go.

"To Kirklands," was the brief reply; and he left us in as great haste as he had come.

No explanation of this movement was vouchsafed, but my sister was eager to obey his orders, though nothing could be done with speed enough to keep pace with Reginald's impatience. Several days were needed to break up such an establishment as he had formed; and as he absented himself, all the arrangements devolved on Isabel and me. We removed to a hotel, the servants were discharged, the carriage, horses, and furniture sold, and we were ready to start, when Reginald told us we must wait until certain business that he had

on hand was accomplished. It was an anxious interval; day after day slipped away until a fortnight had elapsed. Aunt Aurelia, who came to see us when she heard that we were returning to England, suggested to me that Reginald had only broken up his establishment that we might live at less expense. A shadow of probability there was about this; for when we were settled at the hotel, in the occupation of a small suite of rooms, I heard no more of going to England; and when Isabel urged on her husband a decision, all the answer she could extract was, "You must wait my time."

That this change of abode was preparatory to a final removal from Paris, Isabel was, notwithstanding, persuaded, and one evening we drove out together to the place where the child was buried. She wished to take a farewell of that sacred spot before abandoning it forever.

As might be supposed, she was greatly overcome by the remembrances it called up. She wept unrestrainedly as we returned to Paris, and on our reaching her room she fainted.

While I was attending to her, I did not observe how agitated and confused was the maid who assisted me, but presently Aunt Aurelia, who had come during our absence, beckoned me to leave my sister, as she had something to communicate. She led me into the *salon*, where Colonel Longstaff was sitting. I saw that something frightful had occurred.

"Reginald was brought here about two hours ago, dangerously wounded, and, as you were absent, we were sent for," said my aunt. "The surgeons are with him now, and the colonel fears that he has but a poor chance. It is better that you should know the worst; but Isabel has been tried enough: keep it from her for to-day, unless he should desire to see her."

"How did it occur?" I asked.

"A duel," replied the colonel—"a duel about some gambling quarrel, most likely. He has had more than one affair of that kind on his hands already."

We waited long for the appearance of the surgeons, but when they at last came out of the room their faces were not those of men who leave death behind them; and we were immeasurably relieved to hear that, though painful and dangerous, the wound was not necessarily mortal, if the patient could be kept free from excitement.

A professional nurse was already installed in charge of him, and the surgeons advised that no other person should enter his room.

After this the colonel and Aunt Aurelia went away home, promising to come back if any change supervened.

Isabel had not seen them, which was so far well; but when she recovered from her swoon, she seated herself in a particular window, where she was in the habit of resting for no other purpose than to watch her husband pass across the court in leaving and returning to the hotel. She had no suspicion of what had occurred, and might have been kept in ignorance for that night, had not Reginald sent a message that he wanted to see me immediately.

"I did not know he was in," my sister remarked with surprise, and I left her.

I found Reginald exhausted and suffering, but quiet; and the nurse being gone out of the room, he told me that he wanted to make some arrangements for his wife in case any thing should happen to himself.

"Not that I anticipate a fatal termination," he hastily added; "but it is as well to be prepared for any event. I have no right to expect that Isabel will regret me; I have not given her much cause. But it is of no use to speak of that now."

He paused and groaned deeply: his wound caused him extreme suffering, and his mind was half astray; his working lips, contracted brow, and ashen cheek attested that he had a coward fear of death.

His was not a brave nature. I could not but pity him as

the great beads of perspiration oozed on his forehead, and his fierce eyes were darkened with burning tears.

It was not without a great effort that he could proceed with what he wished to say.

"If ever I rise from this bed, it will be as a ruined man," he gasped at length. "Kirklands I could not sell, or it would have gone long since: all the salable timber was cut down last year. The house is falling into ruin for want of repairs. There will be that and Isabel's settlement: nothing else except her jewels. I am glad I did not get them from her. Since the boy died, I have been quite reckless. I don't know that I can do any thing better than die—nothing less than a miracle could help me to retrieve that desperate throw: it was of no use taking half measures. Oh, that cursed woman!"

He began to speak in an excited way, while his face flushed, and his eyes burnt with fever.

Alarmed for the consequence, I attempted to leave him, but he arrested me with a feeble motion of his hand.

"Promise me not to leave Isabel," he said, with difficulty. "In a few hours my fate will be decided one way or other. Let nobody in to see me: I should like to have poor Isabel about me, though. She has the softest step and gentlest touch of any woman I know: she nursed me through a fever that I had soon after we were married. But I can not bear tears and reproaches: my only chance is perfect quiet."

The pain of his wound extorted another groan from his laboring chest; for a second or two he lay silent, and then bade me call in the nurse. As I went out I faced my sister, standing pale, but quite collected and self-possessed, before the door.

"You need tell me nothing, Kathie: I have heard all, and am going in there to my husband," she said, quietly.

"Yes, Isabel; he has asked for you."

A sort of sudden light came over her countenance, but

faded almost ere it was seen; accompanied by the nurse, she accordingly entered Reginald's room.

It was a tedious cure, and for weeks a very doubtful one. Isabel's tenderness and devotion were beautiful to witness, and I think they touched her husband's hard heart to the core. Her face lost its wan hopelessness, and a sort of chastened joy looked forth from her eyes: it seemed that she had triumphed over his evil nature by her faithfulness. He was ready and eager to acknowledge it himself; and I felt half ashamed of the doubts that lessened to my mind his sick repentance. Would it stand?

It was the end of September before he was fit to be removed, and then we traveled by slow journeys to London. Here we left him, on the plea of urgent business to transact, and Isabel and I traveled down to Kirklands alone. This urgent business we were both fully aware was play.

LXXXV.

The house at Kirklands had been suffered to fall into partial ruin. Like many fine residences of its period, it was built round a hollow square. The front apartments nearest the sea had been unroofed by a violent storm in the life-time of its last possessor, and had never been restored. The windows and great entrance were built up, and within the empty walls grew thick alder-bushes, nettles, and thorns, among the masses of fallen rubbish which had never been cleared away.

The few apartments that were habitable put me in mind of the haunted houses in the story-books that I had read when a child. They had all an inland aspect; and mine, which was lighted by three long, deeply-sunken windows, was called "Lady Anne's Room." It looked upon the garden—an oblong square, inclosed by a low wall, with a terrace at one side. It had a very neglected appearance: the lawn, long unmown, was covered with coarse grass and reeds, and in the midst was a sun-dial half grown over with ivy.

Only a few of the commonest and hardiest plants bloomed in the formal beds that skirted the pathways; but the whole garden front of the house was tapestried with inwoven masses of ivy, rose, jasmine, and other creepers. In some instances they had been suffered to encroach entirely over the windows, darkening the rooms within completely. At the farther end of this waste was a planting of sweet willow, and a gate leading into an orchard, where were giant fruit-trees and gnarled trunks, coeval with the house itself. The grounds sloped down to the backs of the houses which bordered the near side of the harbor, and on the farther side rose lofty cliffs. From our windows we could see a gray line of wolds, and gleams of a river which entered the sea just below the precipitous rocks on which Kirklands stood.

From the terrace we looked over the Abbey meadows, where stood the ruins of a monastery: far beneath spread the ocean, dotted with boats and sails in fair weather, covered with foam and fragments of wreck when foul winds blew.

The ascent to the house by the carriage-road was dangerously steep, and the entrance through the open gateway into a turfed court unpromising. There was a stagnant fish-pond, with broken fountain and stone steps, an unfathomable well, and some immense pear-trees, which, for generations, had produced no crop but leaves; and the whole shut in by high walls.

Kirklands Church and grave-yard were close by, upon the same east cliff: there was a scent and a presence as of death about the place. Strange that fortune should have carried us up to that old ghost-house, and cut us off from the world as effectually as if she had left us in a prison.

The prospect within was not a whit less dreary than that without. Our sitting-room was long and lofty, wainscoted in panel, and painted of a pale green, with tarnished gilt mouldings; the hangings were of purple silk, dropping to

tatters with age, and the furniture, all of antique and unwieldy form, was covered with threadbare velvet of the same hue. Of all in that desolate chamber we two women only seemed less than a century old. It had a circular portrait of a Sir Hugh (there always is some such portrait in old houses of note)—a false-eyed, beautiful youth, in the dress of a cavalier, who, I thought at first, looked gay and *debonnaire*, but the housekeeper told us that there was a legend concerning him which charged him with having slain his brother in a fit of jealous rage, and then thrown himself from the cliff into the sea, where he was drowned. This room opened into a corridor, lighted at both ends by a tall, narrow lancet—lighted, if any thing could be light in that ghastly place. It seems to me now, when I look back, that it was always twilight there, or storm, or utter darkness. A Rembrandt picture touched with electric fire.

LXXXVI.

Isabel could not settle, neither could I. We were ever in a state of expectancy: such a thing as sitting down to sew or read, or gathering about us home-like employments, was impossible. We were like travelers halting for an anxious rest before embarking on a dangerous voyage.

Beyond the frowsy garden, the court-yard, and the Abbey meadows we never went, except to the church just outside the gateway, almost on the edge of the cliff, whose gleaming white grave-stones might be seen by the mariners far out at sea.

Our daily excitement was watching for the post. I have known both of us sit waiting for an hour beyond the time, buoyed up with the hope that there might have been some accidental delay. We spoke very little together then: the days were gone when there was comfort in many words, and even complaint had a hope behind it.

At last there came a letter from Reginald for Isabel. I

can see her yet—the tremulous eagerness with which she seized it, the tearful joy with which she cried, "He is coming! He will be here to-morrow at noon—to-morrow at noon!"

Her eyes kindled, her brows lightened, and she looked happy again once more.

We had waited for that letter long: all through the wild autumn weather, and now it was Christmas eve. We listened that night to the clanging old church-bells, and talked about Eversley, and home, and our mother. Isabel had bright thoughts, but mine were all sad: it was the time, and what the time recalled.

Up to the house on the cliff had come from week to week, during the past autumn, whispers of that pestilence which had ravaged England when Felix Mayne lived at Kingston. We heard of sudden deaths—of thousands stricken in one day; but now the grave was sated, and its gray minister gleaned only here and there one. I could not shake myself free of dismal memories, though we had lived remote from the destroyer's battle-ground, as if in another land.

"To-morrow at noon" came, but with it came not Reginald. Preparations had been made. Isabel had dressed herself in her prettiest suit: she was never a moment still as the time approached, and her glad excitement broke from her lips in short snatches of song. From the window of my room we could see the road that wound up the hill, and after the hour fixed was past, there she stationed herself to watch.

The night fell—the long, dark Christmas night—but he never came: we knew then that he would never come again. No more pardon, love, hope, or peace; no more looking forward to reunion.

He had been taken ill on the road, and had died; one of the last victims to the pestilence.

LXXXVII.

It is too painful to dwell on the months that followed this event. My sister had a long and severe illness, from which she recovered partially, but she was no more herself. She was quiet and patient, with no recollection of the past, and one fixed idea—waiting for her husband. She was sure that yet he would return, and they should be happy.

During the succeeding summer her health again declined: her frame was worn almost to a shadow; but her hope lost none of its tenacity, or her patient love of its strength.

One night in September I came in from the garden after vainly attempting to walk myself warm. The keen sea-wind, from which there was no shelter in the low stone walls or the stunted shrubs that skirted the pathways, had pierced to the marrow of my bones. I was chilled and depressed with a black shadow looming heavy and close.

"Some new sorrow is coming," I said to myself, as I crept along the dusky corridor to my room. All my life through have I been subject to these presentiments of approaching evil. A warning shadow, forecast on my path by advancing fate, has ever crept to my feet and bid me pause, abide still, and watch. I almost feared to see some spectral form gliding in my steps and peering over my shoulder as I traversed the echoing passages, and twice or thrice looked back in trembling expectancy.

This old house of Kirklands in its ruinous desolation, and what had happened since we had come there, had not been without effect on my nerves. I began to shudder at the rustling among the dead leaves that cumbered the garden walks; the swaying and creaking of the great fruit-trees in the orchard made my heart stand still an instant, and then throb tumultuously, agonizingly. Many a time in those long autumnal nights did I lie trembling in my bed as the shrill-

toned blast came whistling down the chimney, rattling at the windows and ill-closed doors.

Sir Hugh seemed to take a life-like glimmer into his eyes, and I fancied his right hand stained red with his brother's blood; his cheek paled and grew hollow, and his broad brow swart and lowering.

It was dreary, too, listening to the dash of the waves at the base of the cliff whereon Kirklands stood; most dreary when the northeast wind was whistling through the abbey cloisters, and shrieking triumphant over the gray expanse of autumn wold.

And to see poor Isabel, half mistress, half prisoner, trailing about the corridors, always in gala-dress to do Reginald honor; going from room to room, from window to window, watching, waiting, and hoping; standing with head bent to listen, and hand raised to command silence; patient, unresting, with a senseless expectancy of what could never be. Her haggard, youthful face, dressed round with fluttering, loose ringlets; her lips curved and iced into a perpetual, meaningless smile; her voice in its chanting tone, that it wrung my heart to hear, saying in the morning, "He will be here to-day;" and every night, with no whit of its hope abated, "He will come to-morrow."

As I entered my chamber on this evening, I found her peering out at the open window at an angle of the road, visible beyond the orchard wall. She was singing, in a plaintive half-tone, a song that I had not heard before, but always in the same dull, unconscious way:

"The night is dreary,
The wind is eerie,
And I am all alone:
My heart is weary
And very weary,
For my love, my love is gone!

"The white stars shimmer,
With fading glimmer,
Upon the frozen lake:
My eyes grow dimmer
And ever dimmer,
Weeping for his sweet sake.

"The night is dreary,
The wind is eerie,
And I am all alone:
My heart is weary
And very weary,
For my love, my love is gone!"

She reiterated this mournful ditty until no eye but her own could trace the road; then she shut down the window and turned round.

"It is too late now, Kathie: he will not come to-night," she said, tranquilly, but with a very sad intonation.

"Yes, it is too late now, Isabel dear. Shall we go to the drawing-room? There is a fire, and it is warm there."

I attempted to lead her away, but she gently resisted.

"I do not care for the cold. We can listen better here: let us stay a little longer," she pleaded. "I will lie down on your bed, for I am weary, weary. It has been a long watch, but *surely* he will come to-morrow."

So she lay down, and I paced the room, wrapped in my shawl.

It was changing to a wild and tempestuous night. Through the uncurtained windows I could see the moon riding swiftly amid rifted clouds, and the black sea-swell rolling up loud and angry against the rocks. I stood to look out. Darkness had closed in quickly; but a pale greenish lustre showed over the sea, and a distant mutter spoke of angry winds coming up that way. Often in these still and lonely nights did I turn back page after page of my past life, and give myself to their perusal; but on this occasion an unseen power

snatched me from by-gone things, and sternly riveted my thoughts upon the dreary present.

Isabel suddenly raised herself up. "Listen, Kathie! What is that sound?" she exclaimed. "It is the tramp of a horse on the road. Look out! Listen!"

She bent her ear to the window, and I did the same, humoring her fancy, and both holding our breath.

"It is nothing," she murmured at length, and lay down again.

It was quite dark in the room; I could not see her face; but in these imaginations of hers there was nothing strange to me. I continued my march.

By-and-by she rose again.

"Go up to the tower, sister Kathie, and see if he is coming," she said, laughing that insane laugh which is more torturing than tears. "I hear a horse galloping hard on the road. Who can it be but Reginald? Go up to the tower and listen, and look out."

I went out into the corridor, and up to its farthest window, where a gleam of moonshine broke the darkness. The long sough of the night wind over the sea, and the beating of the waves against the rocks, were the only sounds. After a few minutes I went back.

"There is no one in sight, Isabel, darling," I said. "Let us go down to the fire: it is so cold and desolate here."

"Where is it not cold and desolate?" she said, sobbing. "It is cold and desolate at my heart always. Oh, if he does not come soon I shall die, and never, never, never see him again."

She suffered me to guide her to the old parlor, where the candles were lighted, and a bright fire burnt upon the hearth. The woman who waited upon us was closing the shutters. Isabel bade her leave them open.

The servant remonstrated.

"The wind is enough to drive the sashes in, Miss Brande,"

she said, appealing to me. "I have not heard such a storm blow since the front roof fell in. They had best be fastened."

"He is out in it all, poor Reginald!" replied Isabel, piteously. "Leave them a little longer open. It will cheer him to see the windows' light, and to know that we are thinking of him and expecting him."

If that lost spirit could indeed have peered in from the murky night at his once passionately loved wife, he could not, in his remorseful anguish, have uttered a more fearful wail than moaned by on the blast as Isabel spoke. She shuddered; we all shuddered; it thrilled so like a cry of mortal strife and pain on every one.

"How cold it is! how bitter cold!" gasped my sister, faintly; "and dark too: don't shut out the sky; I like to watch the clouds, Kathie. What is this little child at my knee?"

"There is no child here, Isabel: there is nobody but Jane and me."

She looked wistfully in my face, and presently lay down on the couch by the hearth, when she began to talk softly to herself: she was at our child's prayers again. She went through them twice, and as she finished the hymn she turned her face to me. I had not seen it so bright or clear since last Christmas eve.

"What music is that? Oh, Kathie, how strange and sweet it sounds!" she cried; then the light faded out of her eyes, and she felt about for my hand, and clasped it fast. "Kiss me, Kathie!"

I saw what was coming. Oh God, how well I had learned to interpret this blind gazing at the world that is fading away! Oh, Isabel, my beautiful sister, was it come to this?

"There is that little child again—my baby! Oh, Reginald, why are you not with us? Come, come."

They were the last words she ever spoke.

LXXXVIII.

Isabel lies buried in that ancient sea-side church upon the cliff. Kirklands is a bone of contention among many claimants; it is in Chancery; but even that can not give it a wilder or more desolate aspect than it had when I knew it. I came away two days after my sister's burial, and I have never seen it since.

This is the gloomiest of all my experiences of life: it never brightens in my memory; it is all thick, impenetrable shadow. It was a haunting sorrow to me for years: I continued to hear the wail on the blast, and the murmured child's prayers, amid the bustle and business of strange scenes; and alone at night the swelling and rushing sounds of the sea, though it were a hundred miles away, would fill my dreams.

Those days of mourning are over. When I remember Isabel now, it is as one safe and at rest—better in God's merciful keeping than if she had awakened again to the pain of her desolated life. Let me close this chapter of my history, to revert to it no more.

LXXXIX.

When through all a lifetime one daily necessity—the necessity to work—has been present with us, its sudden withdrawal leaves a blank—a very fatiguing and oppressive blank. In this position I now found myself.

While at Kirklands, my old friend Mr. Longstaff died and left me a bequest of five thousand pounds—a fortune which lifted me above the need of laboring for my bread for the rest of my life. I felt lost: circumstances had hitherto guided me effectually; the day's wants and the day's work had hedged me in. I was much like a traveler in a strange country, who sees no guide-posts to direct him, and stands mooning about until some one comes to show the way. Thus

far the torrent of existence had swept me to and fro on its surface with as little power of resistance as a straw has against a full, swift stream; now a calm had fallen, and I must steer my course for myself.

Stephen's wife would have had me return to them, but I preferred independence and quiet to what had been my previous experience there. Jean, who had now two children, wrote and offered me a home with her; or, if I liked it better, there was a pretty cottage near the Vicarage which I could tenant, and thus have a fireside of my own. This latter plan approved itself to my judgment, but first I determined to go back to Eversley. I had an invincible hankering after the old place: something almost as strong as fate seemed impelling me toward it.

It was not so very long since I had left it, but still there were great changes. The days of coach traveling were over, and the first thing I saw in approaching the city was the Minster rising up in hoary majesty against the pale blue of the January sky. It seemed but as yesterday since I had looked at it through blinding tears when I turned my back on the old house where I was born.

Having deposited my luggage at the inn where I intended staying, I went out to see my ancient haunts. How quiet, old-fashioned, and familiar looked the streets, and yet what strange faces there were grouped about well-known doorways; fine plate-glass fronts replaced many of the old bow-windowed shops; the Minster tower had been built up again, and was growing gray; and the West Bar had been restored.

It was nearly the hour for afternoon service, and the bell was going; on the steps loitered the chorister boys, and a few individuals were walking leisurely toward the great south entrance. Mr. Withers—a trifle more bent than formerly—went in, batting meditatively with his umbrella. I entered the choir, and sat down on one of the benches near the altar. Presently it grew dark almost, and when the glo-

rious organ pealed forth, I seemed borne back on the waves of sound to the lost time of my youth, when I dreamed strange, wild dreams of the Minster in ages past. All the interval was forgotten; my slow pulses quickened, thoughts fantastic streamed through my brain; but when the suggestive music ceased I was my solitary self again, with no possession in Eversley but two graves.

In going out of the choir, when the congregation dispersed, a gentleman passed me by rather quickly, leading a little boy, dressed in mourning, by the hand. I recognized Felix Mayne by his straight port and regular step, but I did not see his face nor he mine. Who could have prophesied, a few years ago, that we two should ever meet there as strangers?

As I left the Minster all the bells rang out a merry peal, for it was some fête-day in Eversley. I stopped on the steps to listen a while, thinking that they were not so sweet as those that used to ring the old years out and the new years in when I was a child at home; and though I have been since assured that they are much finer, I cling still to my own opinion. In the cold January twilight I next walked on to Percie Court. The threatened demolition had not taken place; the house and gateway were there, gloomy and quiet as ever. The door was open, and a woman who descended the staircase as I stood looking about informed me, in answer to my inquiries, that four families now tenanted the house: would I go in and see it? There was a colored window on the stairs which people thought very fine, which was going to be removed to a church that was being restored in the Barbican. No; home-illusions must not be dispelled; so, declining the invitation, I turned into West-gate, determined to close that day's wandering by a visit to Miss Bootle, in the Old Maids' Hospital.

The prim portress who admitted me—herself one of the sisterhood—was very critical over getting my name right for announcement; but at last she led me up to No. 7, the

apartment occupied by my ancient friend. The sudden change from external darkness to the bright, well-lighted little room dazzled my eyes so much for a moment that I saw nothing clearly except a white cat sitting sedately in the centre of the hearth-rug; then immediately I was clasped in the fluttering embrace of Miss Bootle, while she cried, "Oh Kathie, Kathie, who could have thought it? Well, I am glad! I am glad!"

Then she inducted me into the chair from which she had risen, and stood looking at me, and reiterating her expressions of satisfaction. All the time I had a consciousness of somebody else being present, but I did not dare at once to ascertain the truth of the warning I felt by glancing at the figure beyond hers, sitting by the hearth. It was not a minute before we rose simultaneously, as if moved by one impulse, and Kathie's hand again quivered in that of Felix Mayne. He was quite self-possessed and calm, but I was thrilling with alternate chill and fever; I was like a log—so stupid and confused in his presence. His son was standing beside him—a bluff, curly-headed little fellow, with a great look of his father about his eyes; he offered me a tiny, fat hand at Miss Bootle's bidding, and then retreated to Felix's side. The old lady drew in another chair and sat down, and her cat immediately availed himself of the opportunity to jump into her lap.

"Charlie, behave yourself; don't you see that I have company?" said she, giving him an admonitory tap on the nose. "Now, will you two stay and have tea with me? If you will, I shall be delighted."

Mr. Mayne could not—he was to dine with Mr. Withers, he said; but he remained a quarter of an hour longer, and spoke to me kindly about my recent loss in my sister's death.

He was not much changed, except that the thick-clustered locks about his temples were iron gray, and his figure was rather heavier than formerly. His way of speaking, too, was

slower, and I might have fancied that beneath his grave bearing lurked some sting of disappointment, some unsatisfied craving, had I not known how fair and honorable a career he was running before all men. But he was ambitious; and as it is the nature of ambition to delude its votaries, he might, in the midst of his other successes, have missed the one thing that would have given zest to all besides.

"Where are you staying in Eversley?" he asked, as he was going away; and I told him the name of the inn. "Harry will come to visit you. Shake hands with this lady, Harry, and kiss her." The little fellow did so readily, looking very hard at me all the time. "Hannah is with us, as fresh as ever; you will scarcely see her changed." And, after a few more indifferent observations, he and the child went away together.

"Poor Mr. Mayne, I am so sorry for him!" said Miss Bootle, immediately we were alone; "to lose his beautiful young wife so soon!"

Then that fair creature was dead!

"It is not more than two months since; he feels it extremely, and it has quite changed him. I thought him dull to-day; did not you, Kathie?" she added.

Yes, I had found him different; but now his depression was explained. I felt very sorry for him and the child.

"There is a baby; he had it christened Emmeline Katherine, but they call it always Kathie, like you. I wonder at that, now the mother is gone, but perhaps it hurts him to hear her name: she was a lovely creature, so gentle and graceful, and proud of her husband."

I can not tell why, but it pleased me to think that Felix should have borne me so long in remembrance, and kept my name, as it were, in the light of his hearth by giving it to one of his children.

Miss Bootle kept me all the evening, making me listen to the interesting feats recently performed by the venerable

Charlie, and to the gossip of the spinster community. How Miss Linnet was become blind and deaf; how Miss Fernley had got a new dog, a terrier, which daily tried to provoke Charlie to single combat, and was chastised for his belligerent disposition whenever he could be caught; how Miss Parke, the last admitted of the spinsterhood, a lady of penurious habits, would not employ the portress, but acted as her own housemaid; how she had polished her fire-grate with blacking, and her boots with black-lead, and made a loaf of bread so hard that it might have been thrown over the Minster without danger of being broken; how Miss Parley, the busybody of the community, had said that Miss Crosby had said that she had been informed, on the best authority, that there was one lady in the Home who had something more than a lady-like taste for strong waters; how there had been a meeting on the stairs in consequence, with a general investigation of cupboards—all except Miss Parley's, who treated every imputation with contempt, and was, therefore, I might be assured, the guilty party: this, with much more information of the same quality, which formed the staple conversation of the Old Maids. But there was a great spirit of kindness among them too: they were not the selfish, censorious, mischief-making tribe that some people like to assert. In sickness they were attentive and watchful for each other; and the night I was there I saw Miss Bootle don a flannel gown and mob cap, because it was her turn to sit up with Miss Grant, who was ill. I like Old Maids.

XC.

The next morning, while I was dressing to go out for a ramble round the walls, came Harry, with Hannah and the little baby. The boy had brought his whole establishment of Noah's Ark to exhibit, and demanded with importunity that I should help him to set it out, which I did.

"Who are you? What am I to call you? Papa called

you Kathie, like baby," he lisped, looking at me very steadfastly.

Hannah bade him hush, and then began to tell me that he was awful to deal with—worse than his father had been, and *wicker*, if possible. He did recall to me the "troublesome tyke" that his father had been called by Hannah, for he was up and down, and on every chair in the room, in five minutes; he wanted to touch and ask questions about every thing, and to exercise mastership over every body. He had a fine countenance, frank and intelligent; his brow was broad, his cheeks rosy, and his lips sweetly curved; and though his temper was hasty, it was generous, and he had an affectionate heart. The baby was a fair, blue-eyed little thing, that looked profoundly wise and happy, and very fat: it took after its mother more than Felix.

Harry and I were presently the best friends in the world. We had a walk together, in the course of which he informed me that they were going home to Wortlebank soon, and he should be glad, for he wanted to see his pet rabbits, and Carlo, and Ponto, and his pony; and had I been at Wortlebank, and should I like to go? The house was on a hill, and there were flowers, and trees, and a pond; he had tumbled into the pond, and Hannah pulled him out; he did not care about it: he should learn to swim some day. Papa could swim; could I? Hannah could not, and cook could not, but Ponto and Carlo could: they liked it. And so on, his little tongue never stopping until I knew all about Wortlebank and the live-stock there maintained, and was in the confidence of the rabbits as to what they liked best to eat, and how many apartments their hutch contained, and how many they were in family, with other particulars of vast interest to Harry.

Then he wanted to know if I had any pets where I lived, and it being explained to him that I had no home, he eyed me with profound commiseration and wonder, and offered to

give me a rabbit to begin my establishment with. Dear little heart! The same day Felix Mayne called upon me to say good-by. He left Eversley with his children on the morrow; and, having seen my father's and mother's graves, and my old servant Ann, now the possessor of a stout boy, I set my face steadily toward the place that I proposed henceforward to make my home.

I saw now what it was that had drawn me so resistlessly toward Eversley. It was that Felix Mayne and I might meet.

XCI.

So I traveled up into Berriedale, where lived my sister Jean, and having taken possession of "The Nook," sat down to keep house for myself—a free, independent woman, without a tie, a care, or a need in the world. You will naturally imagine that I should be happy and contented now that my time was come to luxuriate in the quiet of repose; to do what I liked, go where I liked, and be as idle as I pleased. Well, you shall judge.

"The Nook" was five minutes' walk from the Parsonage House, where I could see Jean, her husband, and her baby-girl daily, if such were my pleasure. It was nested in a green hollow, circled with trees on the east and north, and having an unintercepted view of Berriedale south and west; there were mossy slopes down to the sweet lakelet near, and blue hills in the remote distance. Its garden was terraced on the descent of the south side of the hollow, and showed to the windows a rich covering of flowers; and the tiny rooms were filled with the prettiest cottage furniture that could be had at Carlisle. I caused book-shelves to be constructed in every recess, and filled them with good new works. Jean said "The Nook" was a little paradise.

All the alterations and arrangements being made, there was nothing more to do but to live and improve my mind.

I regulated my days strictly: so many hours for study, so

many for exercise, so many for helping my sister in the school and among the poor. This would have made some women happy, but it did not satisfy me. I tried to read wise, solid books, and found no interest therein. Next I would put myself through a course of French, Italian, and German—useless; I had never known more than the elements, and had nothing to work from; my brain was not active enough to plod through rules and exercises; my talent for languages was infinitesimal. Miss Palmer used to say so: repeated present failures proved her right.

I fell back insensibly into my old trick of day-dreaming—roaming about the silent summer hills, and along the shores of the clear lake, with no other company than my idle thoughts. There had been times when I coveted such an existence as a respite from work and care; but now, being put into possession thereof, I found it stagnant, lifeless, selfish, wearisome. Jean marveled, and asked what I would have; then, in her gentle, orderly way, counseled me to be active, and, in furtherance of this beneficial state, offered me plain sewing to do for the poor old women of the parish. I accepted it, and, when the long evenings returned to keep me in-doors, did a considerable amount of useful needlework. For company there was the tinkling of the fire in the grate, the wavering of my own shadow on the wall, and the spirit of some living genius evoked from the vital page to talk a while with mine.

What could a reasonable woman crave beside? Unfortunately, I never was a reasonable woman. A restless spirit always possessed me whenever and wherever fate chained me down; there was a burden of wasting energy clogging my being; what I did neither filled my mind nor my time, nor did it satisfy my conscience. I seemed to be of no more use in the world than the snail in its shell. In course of my early laborious years I had often made it a matter of reflection how ladies, without recognized vocations, filled up the hours

of their day. Did they do worsted roses, or bore holes in muslin for their chief work; or write letters, or practice the piano, or gossip and spoil sheets of cardboard; or did they do each and all alternately, the year in and the year out, until they were exalted to the head of an establishment, or gently declined into spinsterdom? Not that I despised or condemned these innocent and useful occupations; but if they were, or are, the staple of some women's lives, lucky are those whom fortune has constrained to earn the bread they eat.

XCII.

For nearly sixteen months I lived on at "The Nook" in this state of rebellious indolence. I endeavored to make my pen, long laid aside, companionable again; but imagination now went clad in sober weeds, and the inspiration of my thoughts was no more hope, but only memory. The rhymes and stories that I spun in my enforced leisure found their readers at the rectory—I believe my sister Jean still keeps them—but they traveled no farther abroad; their end was accomplished when they had filled my vacancy. The commonplace-book that I kept, too, during these days, far outrivaled in bulk that old one to which reference has twice been made in these pages, and that—the cream of many an hour's pleasant reading—some one else treasures as a memento of that time. I like to look at it occasionally myself, that I may compare old impressions with new, and note what struck me as true, forcible, and actual then.

My circumstances guided my taste assuredly; backward glances at youthful days, dreary reflections on the vanity of human hopes, are thick set upon the pages, but of lightsome fancy there is very, very little. My life then was a weariness, a craving for something it had not, and never hoped to have again.

How would my heart have echoed this exquisite thought of one who I have been told lies in her grave now, though

when I was wearing through my troubles she had not written it, conceived it—was, indeed, in the blossom of her youth!

"However old, plain, desolate, afflicted we may be, so long as our hearts preserve the feeblest spark of life, they preserve also, shivering near the pale ember, a starved, ghostly longing for appreciation and affection."

Yes, "a starved, ghostly longing for appreciation and affection," that was what gnawed at my heart perpetually; there had never been but one who appreciated me, never but one who loved me as I would be loved. And where was he? Busy in the world; full of care, of business, of pleasure perhaps.

For sixteen months, as I said before, did I linger on at "The Nook;" but in the second spring the restless fit seized me again, and I was seriously meditating a flight, when there came for me once more a day of real sunshine. Jean, meeting me that morning in the Parsonage Lane, cried out, "Kathie, one would say that you bloom late. You have quite a color in your face: our Berriedale breezes have turned you young again."

I said, "Have they, Jeanie? I am glad of that. I felt an hour ago as if I were floating backward a year or two. So I don't look *quite* ancient?"

"No, not at all. What has happened? Tell me—tell me quick."

This was what had happened. That morning, while gathering a few early-blowing violets in the garden, the Berriedale postman handed me a letter over the hedge—one of those dear Thursday letters that used to come to Percie Court so many years ago. It was like them in tone and spirit, and, as then, it filled me with a quiet gladness. Felix wrote that he was going to travel into the North, "and whether I come to Berriedale or not must depend on you, Kathie," he added.

And I had written "Come."

XCIII.

One morning, then, when "The Nook" was looking its brightest under a spring sunshine, he came, and I met him alone at the gate. There was no need of lengthy explanation: we were together, and we were happy. Our fate was given to us, and we were content.

"You wear my ring still, Kathie, I see," Felix said.

"Yes; it has never been absent from my finger a single day since you put it on eleven years ago."

"Faithful Kathie!"

"And are you happy, Felix?"

"Yes; I have got my desire now. I have had my fill of other people's praise, and only care to hear Kathie tell me that I have done well."

"Felix, it has been the greatest pride of my life to remember that you loved me."

"As it shall be my life's pleasure to love thee always, my darling Kathie!"

When Francis Maynard and Jean arrived an hour after, all the sorrowful past had been briefly conned and put away from us, and we were busy with our future—as happy and scarcely less hopeful than on the first day of our acknowledged love.

A month later I went to Wortlebank with Felix—his wife. His children—*my* children now—were there to welcome us; and that was the happiest coming home I ever had, or am ever likely to have in this world.

And now, my fate being rounded to the full accomplishment of all my dearest hopes, what does there remain to chronicle besides? Fireside happiness—calm, pure, equable—can not be much dilated on. Our united lives have flowed smoothly and pleasantly, and I think not that our long separation has been without its good for both. It is half a dream to look back upon now, and the shadows that haunt

it wear the guise of Faith, and Patience, and Love, and have no frown of reproach to darken the time present. Our hearth is joyous with young faces—"troublesome tykes!" says Hannah; but "there's many a care comes saddled with a blessing," say I, quoting my old servant Ann: a homely truth which every mother's heart must echo.

Farewell.

THE END.